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**APRIL 2017**

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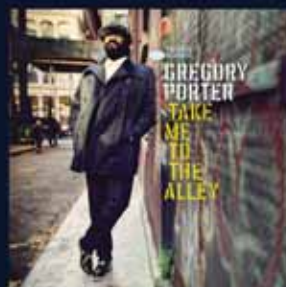
## GOGO PENGUIN LIVE AT ABBEY ROAD

**Mercury Prize nominated** UK trio release new EP to coincide with their appearance at the **SXSW Music Festival in March**. Recorded live at the **legendary Abbey Road Studio** in London, the EP includes favorites from their 2016 Blue Note debut *Man Made Object*.



## TERENCE BLANCHARD THE COMEDIAN SOUNDTRACK

**Multiple GRAMMY-winning** trumpeter and composer **TERENCE BLANCHARD** composed a sublime jazz score for the film *The Comedian*, directed by **Taylor Hackford** and starring **Robert De Niro**. The Trumpeter's top notch sextet features pianist **KENNY BARRON** and tenor saxophonist **RAVI COLTRANE**.



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APRIL 2017

# Inside

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#### 'Reservoir of Positivity'

BY ALLEN MORRISON

With his incredible musical chops and gregarious personality, Jon Batiste has become one of the most beloved musicians on TV, thanks to his role as the music director for *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. DownBeat catches up with the Juilliard-trained pianist/keyboardist to discuss his efforts to bring jazz to new audiences.



Jon Batiste performs at the 2015 Newport Jazz Festival.

Cover photo of Jon Batiste shot by Jimmy and Dena Katz in New York City on Nov. 16.

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Roberto Fonseca

ARIEN CHANG

## Different Perspective

**THE AMAZING PHOTO OF ROBERTO FONSECA THAT ACCOMPANIES**

this column gives us pause. It actually took my brain a few seconds to process this portrait, which was taken by photographer Arien Chang (aka Arien Chang Castán). Initially, I thought this was an aerial shot; I thought the photographer had stood on a ladder and pointed the camera downward at Fonseca, who was in some type of stage pit. But then I realized that Fonseca was suspended in the air, with buildings and archways serving as a backdrop. This image strikes me as a brilliant metaphor on the concept of looking at things from another person's perspective.

In our story on Fonseca (see page 14 in *The Beat*), he talks about his new album, *ABUC*, which melds traditional and modern styles of music associated with his homeland, Cuba. Journalist John Murph talked to Fonseca about the ways in which Cuba might change due to its current, more open relationship with the United States.

"I'm hoping that the cultural exchanges will never stop," Fonseca said. "We can learn a lot of things from the United States and vice versa."

Indeed, from a merely artistic point of view, the musical landscape in the United States has profoundly benefitted from and been influenced by music that originated in Cuba, and vice versa.

Singer Daymé Arocena (see page 26 in *Players*) is another Cuban musician who has inspired many Americans to dig deeper into Cuban music. She shares some similarities with Fonseca, including a potent combination of musical chops and warm personality that draws listeners in. Fonseca and Arocena are both shining examples of how cultural exchange can enrich musicians and audience members alike.

This is the time of year when the jazz world looks ahead, with wonder and anticipation, to the summer festival season. (Our May issue will contain a comprehensive guide to festivals around the world.) We look forward to not only the great music, but also to the prospect of meeting people from around the globe, and hearing their perspectives on music, the role of the arts, and perhaps even their overall philosophy on life.

The crowd at a jazz festival is often a beautiful array of diversity, where disparate folks get together for an hour or so of peaceful fun.

Between sets, fans who respectfully chat with one another might even learn a thing or two.

But not every crowd is filled with attentive fans. Every jazz road warrior has tales of inconsiderate folks who ruin a show for the fans around them. So, whether you're listening inside a quiet theater or dancing in the streets, let's all take a vow to be considerate of one another and remember that we're all there for the same reason—to enjoy the music.

Sometimes it's instructive to think about our behavior from another person's point of view.

DB





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## Chords & Discords >

### Transcending Politics

I need to walk back some of the statements I made to DownBeat ("Back from the Brink," February). I am no longer angry about the election; I accept it. I have musician friends who did not vote my way. I have no place implying, as I did in the article, that their votes were insincere or illegitimate; that is a sacred choice for all Americans and it needs to be respected.

Also—and this is very important—I believe that I have a responsibility to transcend politics, focusing instead on finding ways to touch people's hearts through music. I never want to forget all the great players who mentored me in the art of demonstrating restraint regarding hot-button issues; these men and women advised me to exercise discretion, and to behave with exemplary humanity. I need to follow that advice.

I regret that I may have offended anyone. DownBeat is, after all, a journalistic haven for



TRACY CORYELL

Larry Coryell

art and creativity. DownBeat and the other jazz magazines assiduously focus on America's greatest art form: jazz. We need for these publications to continue their mission of creating value through promoting and exploring jazz. My comments did nothing to further the cause of our music. I apologize.

With best regards from Berlin, Germany,

LARRY CORYELL

### Contextualizing Ella

I'd like to thank John McDonough for paying tribute to Ella Fitzgerald's elegance and creativity with writing that matched it ("The Immortal First Lady of Song," January).

Instead of skimming lightly over Fitzgerald's entire history in a two-page article, McDonough had the inspiration to take a single moment and make it a fulcrum that brought Fitzgerald's past and future into focus.

Her 1955 interview with DownBeat seems straightforward enough, but McDonough shows how this was the first step on the long road to the masterful Songbook records. Until I read this article, I never fully appreciated the machinations behind the origins of Verve Records or how Elvis Presley was an impetus for the canonization of the Great American Songbook, and how Fitzgerald's artistic vision was uniquely positioned to make both of them happen.

I hope this insightful and concise essay becomes familiar to all of Fitzgerald's scholars and many fans.

ALLEN MICHIE  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

### Local Pride

In the February issue, your 2017 International Jazz Venue Guide, covering 31 countries, is a reminder of the remarkable way that jazz has spread around the world. Local pride compels me to mention two oversights in the listings for Northern California.

This year, the SFJAZZ Center will present more than 300 concerts and events. And while its Miner Auditorium might be too large to qualify as a "music room" for the purposes of your guide, the venue's intimate Joe Henderson Lab (with space for 80 to 100 people)

certainly does qualify.

Second, and no less vital to the East Bay jazz scene, is Oakland's Piedmont Piano Company, which offers a full schedule of solo and small-ensemble concerts (both jazz and classical). It has presented performances by Alan Broadbent, Taylor Eigsti and Dick Hyman.

In-store concerts may sound like a clever expedient, but in the case of Piedmont Piano—whose lovely Art Deco building in downtown Oakland is nothing less than a cathedral of keyboards—listening to jazz masters command an unamplified Fazioli or Yamaha concert grand is a transformative experience.

GARY O. LARSON  
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

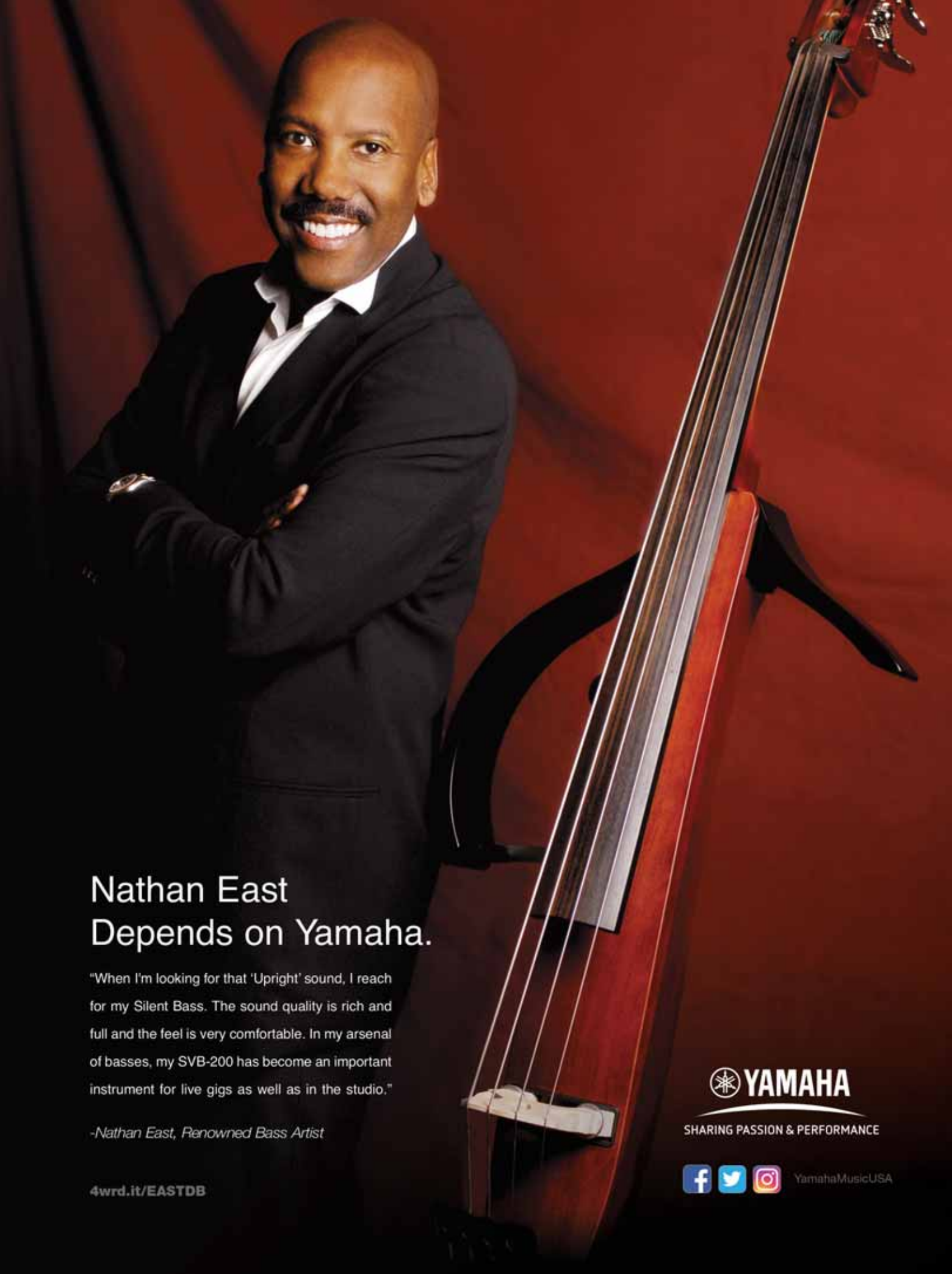
### Corrections

- In the March issue, the review of Carol Bachy-Rita's *Minha Casa/My House* misspelled the name of pianist/composer Bill Cantos.
- In the March issue, the review of David Weiss & Point of Departure's *Wake Up Call* should have indicated that John McLaughlin's "Sanctuary" appeared on the Mahavishnu Orchestra's album *Birds Of Fire*. Also, the name Nir Felder was misspelled.
- The Blues column in the March issue had incorrect text for a review of Donald Ray Johnson & Gas Blues Band's *Bluesin' Around*. The correct review is posted on our website and will appear in the May issue.
- In the February issue, the Jazz Venue Guide listing for Chicago's Jazz Showcase should have indicated that venue founder Joe Segal first began presenting shows in 1947.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com) or find us on Facebook & Twitter.



A portrait of Nathan East, a smiling man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit and white shirt. He is standing next to a large, upright, reddish-brown Yamaha Silent Bass. The background is a warm, textured red.

## Nathan East Depends on Yamaha.

"When I'm looking for that 'Upright' sound, I reach for my Silent Bass. The sound quality is rich and full and the feel is very comfortable. In my arsenal of basses, my SVB-200 has become an important instrument for live gigs as well as in the studio."

*-Nathan East, Renowned Bass Artist*

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# Jazz SERIES

2016/17 SEASON

DANILO PEREZ



FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 8:00

## ***Jazz 100: The Music of Dizzy, Ella, Mongo and Monk***

Danilo Pérez *musical director and piano*

Chris Potter *saxophones*

Avishai Cohen *trumpet*

Wycliffe Gordon *trombone*

Ben Street *bass*

Adam Cruz *drums*

Roman Diaz *percussion*

Lizz Wright *vocals*

OSCAR PETERSON



FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 8:00

## ***Oscar, with Love***

**A tribute to Oscar Peterson featuring Kenny Barron, Robi Botos, Bill Charlap, Benny Green, Ramsey Lewis and Renee Rosnes**

CHARLES LLOYD



FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 8:00

## **Charles Lloyd and The Marvels with opener Tomeka Reid Quartet**

FRIDAY, MAY 5, 8:00

## **SFJAZZ Collective**

***The Music of Miles Davis & Original Compositions***

Miguel Zenón *alto saxophone and flute*

David Sánchez *tenor saxophone*

Sean Jones *trumpet*

Robin Eubanks *trombone*

Warren Wolf, Jr. *vibraphone*

Edward Simon *piano*

Matt Penman *bass*

Obed Calvaire *drums*

REGINA CARTER



## **Regina Carter *Simply Ella***

FRIDAY, MAY 19, 8:00

## **Nicholas Payton & Afro-Caribbean Mixtape with opener Steve Wilson - Lewis Nash Duo**

FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 8:00

## ***New Fables: Muldrow, Moran and Mingus***

Jason Moran *piano and the Bandwagon*

NICHOLAS PAYTON

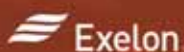


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Beat

# Lavish Box Set Salutes Ornette

Ornette Coleman made his final public appearance on June 12, 2014, at a free concert held in his honor in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. "He was only supposed to be there as a spectator," recalled his son Denardo, who organized the event and led the backing band, which included saxophonist Antoine Roney, guitarist Charles Ellerbe, electric bassist Al MacDowell and upright bassist Tony Falanga. "We brought his horn, but we didn't bring it expecting him to play."

Once the music began, though, Ornette joined in for two electrifying numbers. Afterward, he sat down to watch an array of jazz and rock stars—Henry Threadgill, David Murray, Ravi Coltrane, Joe Lovano, Branford Marsalis, John Zorn, Patti Smith, Flea, Bill Laswell and many more—interpret his tunes and honor his inspirational creative spirit.

"We had been playing [for], like, 50 years together, and I realized it could be the last time we are playing together in public," Denardo said. "Just hearing his horn onstage, for me, was a wonderful moment."

Almost exactly one year after the concert, Coleman passed away (on June 11, 2015). His memorial service at New York's Riverside Church was another all-star affair, with Pharoah Sanders, Cecil Taylor and many others either speaking or performing.

Now, after a crowd-funding campaign and a lengthy production process, both events have been preserved in a lavish box set on Song X, a label Denardo has established to extend his father's legacy into the future. *Celebrate Ornette* gathers all the music from the concert and the memorial on three CDs and four LPs, while two DVDs contain performances, speeches, backstage interviews and more.

Denardo explained that his father always expected the concert to be released. "That summer, after the concert, we started working on it at his house. He was right there during the process."

The packaging of the limited-edition box set is superb: Each LP comes in its own jacket, and there's a thick booklet full of rare photos and highly personal, heartfelt liner notes by Denardo, James Blood Ulmer, Artists House label head John Snyder and Ornette's former manager and producer James Jordan. A copy of the program from Ornette's memorial service, signed by Denardo, is tucked into each copy.

This isn't the first time Ornette Coleman's music has been issued on a family-owned label. In the 1990s, father and son formed Harmolodic and licensed four albums to Verve; then, in 2006, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Sound Grammar* was released on an imprint of the same name. Though this is Song X's only planned release for 2017, Denardo is busily cataloging his father's archives. "There are some unreleased studio recordings,



Tributes to the late Ornette Coleman are documented on *Celebrate Ornette*.

and there are some live things, going back to the '60s," he said. "We've got quite a bit of stuff."

One item he's particularly excited about is a full audio and video recording of the symphony *Skies Of America*, performed in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1985 and filmed by Shirley Clarke, director of the documentary *Ornette: Made in America*.

There's a possibility that some of Ornette's catalog will reappear. His Impulse! albums, *Ornette At 12* and *Crisis*, have never been released on CD, and the Verve albums are all out of print. "We've started some discussions about [specific titles]," Denardo said. "There are a bunch of albums that are out of print. So one of the things we're going to try to do with the [Song X] label is to have all of his stuff available again." —Phil Freeman

## Riffs >

ASHLIN WASHINGTON



Terence Blanchard

### Strong Cast:

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard has composed the jazz score for Taylor Hackford's film *The Comedian*, starring Robert De Niro and Leslie Mann. The Blue Note album is already available digitally, and the CD version will be released on April 7. Blanchard recorded the music in a sextet with pianist Kenny Barron, tenor saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, alto saxophonist Khari Allen Lee, bassist David Pulphus and drummer Cary Allen. Blanchard has more than 50 scores to his credit. [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com)

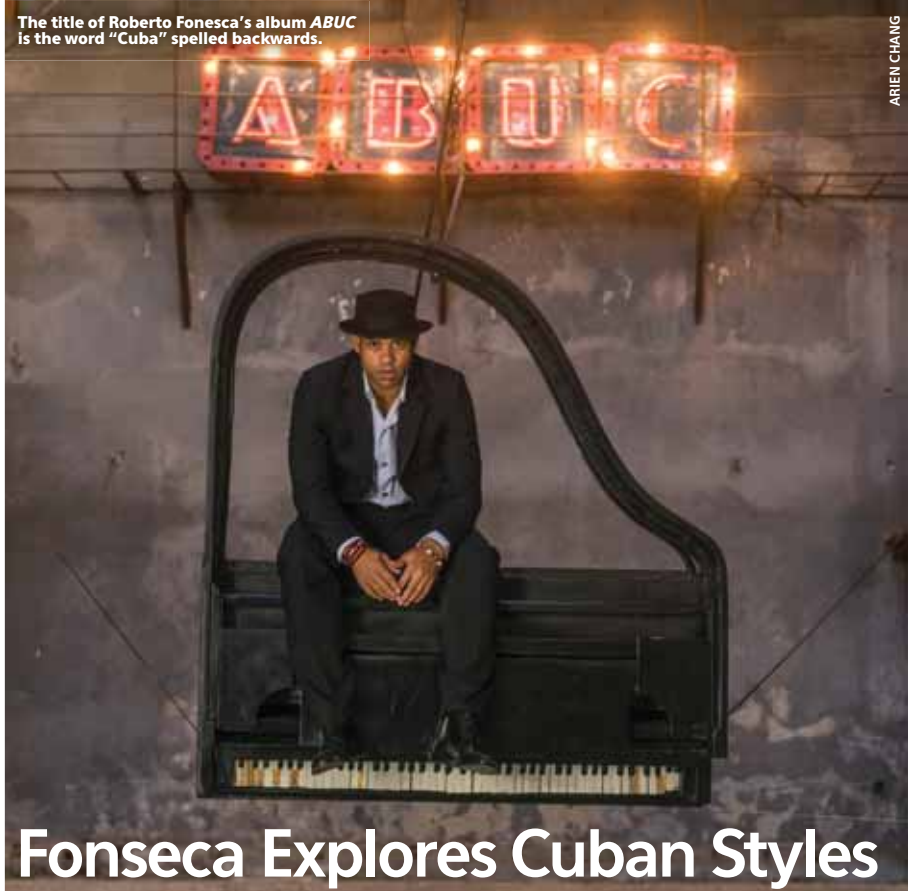
**Mark Your Calendar:** Jazz pianist and singer Diana Krall's new album, *Turn Up The Quiet* (Verve), will be released on May 5. The album celebrates her return to jazz and the Great American Songbook and reunites Krall with legendary producer Tommy LiPuma. Krall's world tour kicks off on June 2 in Minneapolis. [dianakrall.com](http://dianakrall.com)

**TTB Chronicled:** Tedeschi Trucks Band will release its second live album and first concert film, *Live From The Fox Oakland* (Fantasy), on March 17. Filmed and recorded on Sept. 9, 2016, in Oakland, California, the concert film and audio were mixed using a vintage Neve console. The band kicks off a tour in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 23 and heads to Europe for dates in March and April. [tedeschitrucksband.com](http://tedeschitrucksband.com)

**Final Bar:** Charles "Bobo" Shaw, drummer and one of the founding members of the St. Louis-based Black Artists Group (BAG), died Jan. 16 at age 69. Over the course of his long career, Shaw made recordings with the Human Arts Ensemble, Oliver Lake, Lester Bowie, Anthony Braxton and Billy Bang.

**Farewell:** Chuck Stewart, one of the most acclaimed photographers in jazz history, died on Jan. 20 at age 89. Stewart's work graced album covers and appeared in many publications, including *DownBeat*. Among the artists he photographed were John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Bill Evans, Tito Puente and The Beatles.

The title of Roberto Fonseca's album *ABUC* is the word "Cuba" spelled backwards.



ARIEN CHANG

## Fonseca Explores Cuban Styles

### AFTER ENGAGING IN BRILLIANT CULTURAL

exchanges between his homeland of Cuba and such countries as Bulgaria, Morocco and Algeria on earlier albums—including *Akoka* (2009) and *Yo* (2012)—pianist Roberto Fonseca zeroes his focus squarely on Cuba with his latest outing and Impulse! Records debut, *ABUC*.

As the peculiar album title suggests, Fonseca takes a prismatic observation of the Caribbean nation, exploring traditional Afro-Cuban idioms while also investigating some of the island's more contemporary rhythmic pulses. "On this new record, we want to show how Cuban artists tie the present with the past: That's why we decided to spell Cuba backwards," he explained. "We want to teach people what Cuba's really about."

Fonseca, 41, values tradition yet is hardly confined by it. Even while exploring Afro-Cuban jazz, he superbly presents it as progressive and protean with its own unique cosmopolitan DNA.

*ABUC* opens and closes with invigorating makeovers of "Cubano Chant," a Ray Bryant mid-'50s gem. On the propulsive opening version, Fonseca traces Afro-Cuban jazz to its U.S. bebop ties via a New Orleans-inflected guaracha groove. That Crescent City vibe is reinforced by the guest appearance of Trombone Shorty. On the disc's conclusion, Fonseca revisits the song by launching into a spellbinding solo piano excursion.

Between Fonseca's variations of "Cubano Chant," he reconciles old-school idioms, such as *contradanza* ("Contradanza Del Espíritu") and bolero (*Después*), with more recent musical styles, such as reggaeton ("Soul Guardians") and moody electronica ("Velas y Flores").

"The main thing is to take risks," he said. "I

don't want to make music for the music industry just to make myself more commercially popular," he said, before referencing the iconic albums he's performed on by Buena Vista Social Club singers Ibrahim Ferrer and Omara Portuondo. "When I'm presenting my own music, I never play any of those classic songs I did with the Buena Vista Social Club."

"*ABUC* is like my ID," he continued. "But on most of my other records, I was trying to show my influences that come from outside of Cuba. With *ABUC*, I'm trying to show where I come from."

The new album serves as an enticing calling card for those either already fascinated by Cuban culture or neophytes just learning of it. And the disc is tied to Fonseca's role as the director of the Santiago de Cuba wing of Cuba's International Jazz Festival. In December, that festival presented U.S. artists such as Christian McBride, Terence Blanchard and Snarky Puppy alongside such Cuban stars as singer Daymé Arocena and pianist Dayramir González.

Thanks to diplomatic efforts by the Obama administration, it is now easier for U.S. citizens to visit Cuba. And while the romantic allure of antique cars, Art Deco architecture and tantalizing cafés has some U.S. citizens planning to venture into Cuba before what they argue will be a dramatic shift due to new investments, Fonseca laughs off such concerns. "I'm hoping that the cultural exchanges will never stop," he enthused. "We can learn a lot of things from the United States and vice versa."

"But Cuba isn't going to change altogether. We don't want to sell off our country. We know what things we should change; and we know what things we should keep."

—John Murph



"In this trumpet, I hear  
the sound of our icons."



**Trumpeter Wallace Roney** has earned his status amongst the jazz elite by playing with the greatest artists in history, such as Tony Williams, Ornette Coleman, Herbie Hancock, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Chick Corea, Wayne Shorter and of course his hero, Miles Davis. His trumpet of choice is the legendary Martin Committee given to him by Miles. Wallace insists that he plays Martin not only because of Miles's influence but because he's tried every trumpet out there, putting them through the test of scales, arpeggios, evenness, articulation, and most important—*sound*—and he found the Martin Committee the best. Now, with the release of the Kanstul 1603, we have a faithful recreation of the classic Committee, and players everywhere can experience the magic of the horn preferred by Miles, Dizzy, Roy Eldridge, Fats Navarro, Chet, Blue Mitchell, Maynard, Kenny Dorham, Art Farmer, and classical trumpeter Armando Ghittila. As Wallace says about his Kanstul Model 1603+, "This is absolutely the best horn I've ever played—it plays exactly like my classic horn given to me by Miles. It plays immaculately, like the best Committee you could find. In this trumpet I hear the sound of the greats, and the sound of the future."

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Wallace Roney photo: Timothy Moersh



Ralph Towner's new solo guitar album is *My Foolish Heart*.

# Towner's Pianistic Approach to Guitar

**GUITARIST/PIANIST RALPH TOWNER**

has been in the thrall of Bill Evans (1929–'80) for most of his musical life. On Towner's latest album, *My Foolish Heart* (ECM), the title track is the famous standard (composed by Victor Young with lyrics by Ned Washington), which is closely associated with the legendary pianist. Towner, 77, places it a third of the way through a program that also includes 11 compelling original compositions.

Towner rose to international fame in the 1970s, thanks to his solo albums (such as 1973's *Diary*), his work with the Paul Winter Consort, a string of successful albums by Oregon (a band he co-founded) and collaborations with guitarists John Abercrombie and Larry Coryell and the group Weather Report.

He has remained an active collaborator, and in recent years has recorded with trumpeter Paolo Fresu (*Chiaroscuro*), in a guitar trio with Wolfgang Muthspiel and Slava Grigoryan (*Travel Guide*) and with saxophonist Javier Girotto's band Aires Tango (*Duende*).

On *My Foolish Heart*, Towner's first solo guitar record in a decade, he alternates between classical and 12-string guitar. He is promoting the album with a U.S. tour, including a series of dates in California: San Francisco (Feb. 23), Santa Cruz (Feb. 26), La Jolla (March 2) and Los Angeles (March 3).

DownBeat spoke to Towner via phone from Rome, where he has lived for 20 years.

**AS A PIANIST AND GUITARIST, YOU'VE HAD A LONG RELATIONSHIP WITH STANDARDS, SUCH AS "MY FOOLISH HEART."**

Jazz standards usually came out of the Tin Pan Alley era and movies with the great composers. That's the way I used to play the piano back when I was emulating Bill so much. And on classical guitar, "My Foolish Heart" sounds quite good, because I play it very pianistically. I do play standards differently; rhythmically, they're more in swing time, so I play more like if I was in a setting with a bass player or a trio.

**THERE'S A HISTORY AND A CONTRAST THERE, BETWEEN YOUR MUSIC AND STANDARDS.**

In New York in the '70s, I really tried to extend the harmony, using substitution chords with the standards. And I finally realized that if I was putting all these substitutions in, I might as well write my own music. In the '70s, especially in New York, we were trying to write music that included different meters, influenced a lot by the rest of the world. We were coming up with all kinds of different harmonies and branching off from the traditional ways of playing standards. Harmonically they're all very similar—the

way they are structured—with their cadences, dominant chords and key notes that string things together. I never played with a pick, so I never really played an electric jazz guitar. So, I approached them from the point of view of a piano player.

Music was changing in the [early] '70s, with bands; I hooked up with Jack [DeJohnette] and Wayne Shorter. I remember spending an afternoon running through our compositions. [There was also the] scene with Mahavishnu [Orchestra] and Chick [Corea]; we all lived within four or five city blocks of each other.

It was cheap to live, and you didn't have to work too many weddings or anything to pay your rent. So, there was a lot of time to get together and do these creative jam sessions, where we were trying original music. And the music grew out of that with the intention of extending the harmony, and ways to improvise. The pieces got longer and more sectional.

**DURING THAT TIME, YOU GIGGED A LOT WITH YOUR OREGON BANDMATE GLEN MOORE. SOME OF THAT TYPE OF ENERGY SEEMS TO EMERGE ON *MY FOOLISH HEART*.**

This album is kind of a salute to that time when I first heard those Village Vanguard recordings with Scott [LaFaro] and Paul [Motian]. And it hit me so hard, I said, "I want to know what it feels to play like that, to be in that zone." I was slowly putting together my piano playing trying to sound like Bill. That was about '64.

**YOU DEVELOPED A GUITAR STYLE THAT ALMOST INVOKES A GROUP, RATHER THAN A SOLO PERFORMANCE.**

When there's only one person playing, it's not just the number of notes; rather, it's the personalities you can imply, [suggesting] that there's more than one person playing. I'm emulating a group or an orchestra.

Since you're plucking with four different fingers for each string, you're able to control the way each string sounds. Bill Evans' left hand was very much like that. All the voices were put together, in a way. Independent, sounding each line, each voice, each chord. Not just moving parallel, but against each other, and sounding very independent, harmonically. That was part of the magic of his playing, too: the way he harmonized things.

The music ends up being more important than the instrument. The music transcends it somehow. I heard a lot of piano players before then. But what happened between LaFaro and Bill Evans, and the way those three people played together, that was what drew me in. So, basically, I evolved from that period.

—John Ephland



# Ron Rambach's Music Matters Closes Shop

For collectors of jazz reissues on vinyl, Ron Rambach's Music Matters LPs are the next best thing to owning an original pressing. Those originals—from Blue Note, among the most revered labels in jazz—constitute, for many, the holy grail of the jazz collecting world.

Music Matters has reissued two Blue Note titles per month since 2007, resulting in 112 discs reissued as either 45 or 33 1/3 r.p.m. releases. Music Matters will cease operations with a final 13 titles.

"I've reissued 157 titles and I've listened to well over 257 master tapes," Rambach explains. "I don't do this to just put the records out; I do it to release the best records and the best music and the best sound that I can. Some of the tapes I wanted to use weren't in good enough condition. Further transfers weakened them. I've put out two titles a month for 10 years. And I've been in the record business for 35 years."

Music Matters' all-analog LPs are revered for their sonic consistency, and their laminated jackets are equally gorgeous, featuring the same brilliant colors as the original pressings, the exact Reid Miles designs and Francis Wolff's original session photos restored and expanded on each gatefold jacket.

"I just did it for the music," Rambach says. "I knew that if I created something that I'd want to receive in the mail we wouldn't have to spend money on advertising; we could put it all in the product and let it tell its own story."

Music Matters will close out with Rambach's "Murderer's Row" of titles, with albums from Hank Mobley, Wayne Shorter, Duke Pearson and Kenny Dorham.

Rambach shared his all-time favorites for this edition of VINYL.

As with every disc reviewed here, **Kenny Clarke, Francy Boland and Company's *The Golden Eight* (Music Matters/Blue Note 84092, 33 1/3 r.p.m., \$47.95)** is a board-flat pressing with no surface marks or sonic disturbances. Featuring a slimmed-down version of the duo's big band, the octet performs standards as well as spirited Boland originals. Boland's smart arrangements and Clarke's sparkling drumming drive the exceptional 1961 non-RVG recording, a true rarity of the Blue Note catalog. The inner jacket photos are worth the price of admission.

An even more difficult-to-find LP—unless you consider the Japanese reissue—is



Ron Rambach

1956's ***The Magnificent Thad Jones* (Music Matters/Blue Note 1527, 33 1/3 r.p.m., \$43.95)**. This album is one of the most lyrical of all Blue Note releases, featuring Jones' pure trumpet, Billy Mitchell on tenor saxophone, Barry Harris on piano, Percy Heath on bass and Max Roach on drums. Each track is a textbook lesson in the art of relaxed swing.

The title track of **Lee Morgan's *Candy* (Music Matters/Blue Note 1590, 33 1/3 r.p.m., \$43.95)** provides a showcase for the trumpeter and drummer Art Taylor, the duo prancing, dancing and outwitting one another for a solid seven minutes. One of the finest sounding of all Music Matters releases, *Candy* is perfectly paced and performed by a cast including Taylor, Doug Watkins on bass and Sonny Clark on piano. Swinging gracefully and energetically way back in 1958, *Candy*, like many Morgan albums, is a consummate example of small-group jazz recorded one year before Ornette Coleman appeared at the Five Spot and forever changed the shape of jazz to come.

Is there an **Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers** album to own if you can only have one? Yes, and 1964's ***Indestructible!* (Music Matters/Blue Note 84193, 45 r.p.m., \$64.95)** more than fits the bill. 45 r.p.m. adds a sense of purity and sonic realism not available on Music Matters' 33 1/3 discs, or anyone else's for that matter, unless you're buying an original Blue Note "167 Lexington Avenue" or "47 West 63rd" pressing. The great Messengers lineup of Morgan, Shorter, Walton, Workman and Blakey provides thrills and chills. **DB**

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Alphonse Mouzon (1948–2016)

## Remembering Alphonse Mouzon

### DRUMMER-PRODUCER-ENTREPRENEUR

Alphonse Mouzon, who died on Dec. 25 after a long illness, will be remembered as a powerhouse behind the drum kit. He was 68.

Mouzon's resume included work in the earliest incarnation of Weather Report, stints with pianist McCoy Tyner and trumpeter Donald Byrd in the 1970s, membership in the pioneering fusion band The Eleventh House with guitarist Larry Coryell and performing in Trilogue with trombonist Albert Mangelsdorff and bassist Jaco Pastorius.

Over the decades, Mouzon also frequently fronted his own funk-fusion bands.

On Sept. 7, 2016, Mouton was diagnosed with Stage 3-4 Neuroendocrine Carcinoma. By Oct. 10, his kidneys began failing and he was hospitalized for 13 days. He used a crowd-funding platform to help pay for treatment, but his health issues persisted, and he succumbed on Christmas Day.

He was born on Nov. 21, 1948, in Charleston, South Carolina. Following graduation from Bonds-Wilson High School, where he received his early musical training, he moved to New York to study music and drama at New York City College and medicine at Manhattan Medical School. Mouzon

took drum lessons from pianist Billy Taylor's drummer Bobby Thomas, and while attending college he played in the pit band of the Broadway musical *Promises, Promises*.

By the early '70s, he began making his mark on the burgeoning fusion movement while also studying acting. (Later in his career, Mouzon appeared in the 1996 Tom Hanks film *That Thing You Do!* and in the 2007 doo-wop drama *The Dukes*.)

His early recording credits include Weather Report's 1971 self-titled debut, Tyner's 1972 album *Sahara* and 1973's *Song Of The New World*.

During this period Mouzon recorded a string of successful albums as a leader for Blue Note: *The Essence Of Mystery* (1972), *Funky Snakefoot* (1973), *Mind Transplant* (1974) and *The Man Incognito* (1975).

Mouzon joined forces with Coryell in 1973 to form The Eleventh House, a trailblazing fusion group that also featured trumpeter Randy Brecker, keyboardist Mike Mandel and bassist Danny Trifan. The band's 1973 debut on the Vanguard label, *Introducing The Eleventh House*, stands as a classic of the genre on the strength of such potent numbers as Mouzon's "The Funky Waltz."

Coryell and Mouzon had several reunions over the decades and collaborated last year on a new Eleventh House album, *Seven Secrets*, scheduled for a June release on Savoy Jazz.

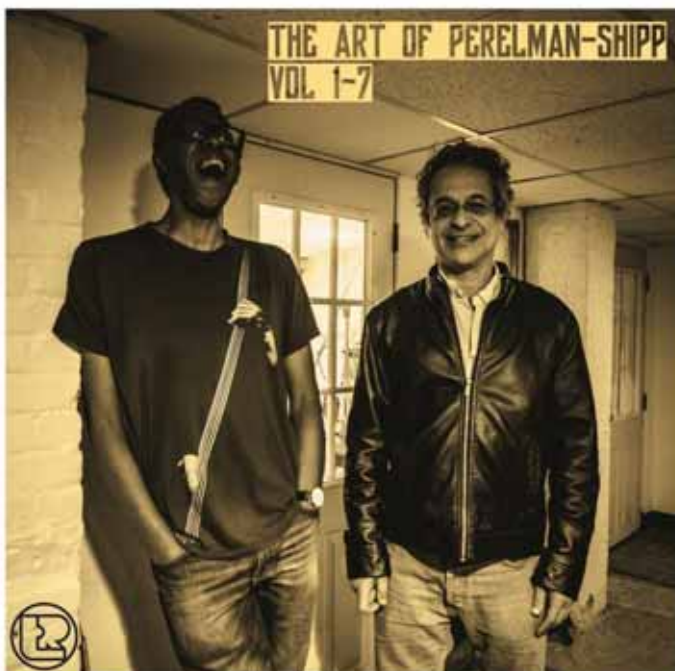
Coryell expressed deep admiration for his fallen comrade: "We shared a desire to expand the audience for jazz by mixing in simple ideas that could evolve into musical complexity; in other words, reel in these new listeners with some simple funk figures, then play some bebop over that. Alphonse's concept was more along the deep-funk route, like 'The Funky Waltz' he did on the first Eleventh House album. And from there we were on our way, pursuing a jazz-based book of contemporary improvised music. It's so funny that what started out [with] a 'Let's see if we might work together' meeting back in 1973 turned out to be a bottomless pit of streaming creativity."

The list of artists with whom Mouzon recorded includes Gil Evans, Roy Ayers, George Benson, Freddie Hubbard, Hubert Laws, Sonny Rollins, Stevie Wonder, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Carlos Santana.

In 1992, Mouzon formed Tenacious Records and released his album *The Survivor*.

Numerous releases for his label, such as *Back To Jazz*, followed. His all-star outing from 2011, *Angel Face*, featured Arturo Sandoval, Wallace Roney, Antoine Roney, Shunzo Ohno, Bob Mintzer, Ernie Watts, Cedar Walton, Kenny Barron and Christian McBride. Mouzon played piano, trumpet and drums on that album.

—Bill Milkowski







An all-star cast at the JEN Conference. Front row, seated from left: Victor Wooten, Roy "Futureman" Wooten, Kirk Whalum, Jeff Coffin, Johnny Vidacovich, Stanton Moore, Branford Marsalis (standing), David Paich, Caleb Chapman, Rubén Alvarez, Howard Levy, Rashawn Ross and Randy Brecker with Caleb Chapman's Crescent City Super Band.

# JEN Grows Up

**THE 8TH ANNUAL JAZZ EDUCATION NETWORK CONFERENCE** had a little more glide in its stride this year when more than 4,000 attendees descended on the birthplace of jazz on Jan. 4–7.

Part of it had to be the location. If New Orleans doesn't make a jazz educator or student musician want to sit up and trade fours—verbally and musically—then nothing will.

Another part had to be the performance lineup, especially the Jan. 6 all-star JEN Scholarship Concert, which raised more than \$30,000 for student scholarships. The concert was headlined by the Jeff Coffin & Caleb Chapman "Inside of the Outside Project" and featured special guests Kirk Whalum, Branford Marsalis, David Paich, Randy Brecker, Victor Wooten, Rashawn Ross, Stanton Moore, Johnny Vidacovich, Tony Dagradi and John Beasley.

This was an education conference, and the participants getting the best education on that night were the backing band, Chapman's Crescent City Super Band, an after-school high school honors band that was perfect for the occasion.

But the biggest reason for the organization's newfound swagger stems from the fact that JEN, in its ninth year of existence, has grown into a full-fledged powerhouse, able to teach and promote jazz at every level.

Born from the ashes of the failed International Association of Jazz Education, JEN has held firm on a pledge to spread that gospel as wide and far as possible, while maintaining a sense of complete transparency and holding itself to a high standard of fiscal responsibility. That has meant expanding the organization's offerings while being careful not to overextend its reach.

That strategy is beginning to bloom. Attendees in New Orleans said the show felt like the best of the old IAJE Conferences. At the same time, JEN seems to be accelerating that growth. The organization has opened up the conference to a much larger array of student performances. This year's event featured more than 110 student performance slots and included groups from throughout the United States and as far away as Russia.

The organization is currently in the midst of an aggressive campaign to increase membership, with a goal of surpassing 4,000 members by 2018. To recruit new members and broaden its reach, JEN is offering an array of incentives and will soon launch a new, improved website.

"I see a future where audiences embrace the tradition, legacy and sound of the greats as well as groundbreaking jazz recordings of new music drawn from a myriad of styles," said Chapman, the JEN president, in a recent JEN newsletter.

The 9th annual JEN Conference is scheduled for Jan. 3–6, 2018, in Dallas.

—Frank Alkyer

(Editor's Note: DownBeat is a contributor to this year's JEN Scholarship Fund, and Frank Alkyer is a member of the JEN President's Advisory Council.)

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Christopher Tordini: Electric Bass  
Elias Stemeseder: Keyboards

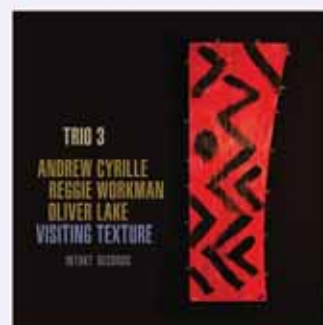
Intakt CD 283 / 2017



### AKI TAKASE DAVID MURRAY CHERRY – SAKURA

Aki Takase: Piano  
David Murray: Tenor Saxophone,  
Bass Clarinet

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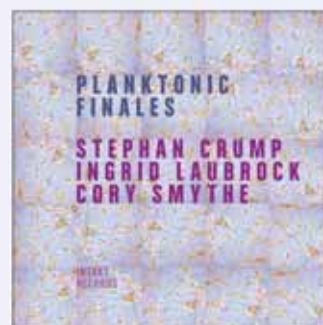


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Peter Asplund has developed a sterling reputation as a trumpeter, singer, arranger and producer.



## PETER ASPLUND

---

### *Inspired by Titans*

Peter Asplund was 4 years old when Louis Armstrong came into his life. “The minute I heard Armstrong,” the Swedish trumpeter recalled, “it was like he was saying to me, ‘OK, this is what you should do: Play the trumpet, play jazz. And eventually, also, sing.’ My family listened to American jazz: Basie, Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Ella, Frank Sinatra and Mel Tormé.”

Inspired by Satchmo, the 4-year-old boy took up the trumpet.

Seated in a hotel lounge, Asplund, 47, chatted with *DownBeat* between performances at the 2016 Stockholm Jazz Festival.

“In 1995,” he said, “I made my first record [*Open Mind*]. I’d been playing a lot around Sweden and Scandinavia. I played standard tunes, mostly, but I was having Miles [Davis]

sitting on one shoulder and Chet Baker on the other every time I played ‘My Funny Valentine.’ I was so influenced by the great names that I’d been listening to. So, the best way for me to find my own sound was to write my own music and play my own songs. And then I could go back and play the standards again. I started to play them the way I play my own music. It was very natural.”

As a youngster, Asplund was influenced by trumpeters and singers alike: “I went through all these people, including Clifford Brown and Kenny Wheeler, and then I listened so much to singers. I always wanted my trumpet playing to be like a singer—lyrical and vocal, but with power, more dynamic, with more temperament.”

In recent years, Asplund’s trumpet style

has tended to be in a modern vein, whereas his singing style nods more to the Swing Era. His 2015 album, *Aspiration* (Prophone), was a significant musical effort that brought those two worlds together.

His latest release, *Songs Of Our Lives* (Crown Jewels), is his third collaboration with Polish singer Vivian Buczek. It showcases Asplund’s trumpet and flugelhorn playing as well as his vocals and his talents as an arranger (including tracks with strings). The program includes standards as well as originals by Asplund. Buczek’s strong vocals are an ideal complement to his peppier singing and playing.

Vocalist Isabella Lundgren’s 2015 disc, *Somehow Life Got In The Way* (Ladybird), put Asplund’s skills as an arranger front and center, with reflective charts that framed her hearty delivery amidst a large ensemble plus strings.

Indeed, the word has been out—particularly among Swedish singers, such as Ellen Andersson and longtime collaborator Viktoria Tolstoy—about Asplund’s various talents (which also include producer). Because of his deep knowledge of the Great American Songbook, artists come to him in search of obscure tunes that share qualities with more famous standards: a rare gem that’s been overlooked. “I’m always hunting,” Asplund explained. “It’s become my thing.”

Once a member of the Stockholm Jazz Orchestra and Tolvan Big Band, Asplund now maintains his own jazz trio, and his focus there is solely on being an instrumentalist. Beginning in 2006, twice a year he and reedist Magnus Lindgren have led a project called the Blue House Jazz Orchestra, which in 2016 collaborated with guitarist John Scofield and keyboardist Mitchel Forman’s quartet.

For *Songs Of Our Lives*, Asplund composed music specifically for Buczek. “I have learned so much from him as a singer,” she said. “Peter has a fantastic ability to write and find music for singers. It’s always a thrill when I get a new song or arrangement from him written especially for me.”

“Vivian has the temperament—and the dynamics and fire—that a lot of the Swedish singers don’t have,” Asplund said. “With the new CD, I felt it was Vivian’s turn to do something more substantial [beyond swinging and scatting], to get deeper into the lyrics, and tell the story.”

Asplund has another project that’s particularly close to his heart. It’s a sextet that has transcribed the classic Marty Paich arrangements that Tormé used. And Asplund sings Tormé’s parts. Given that Asplund’s range and register are similar to those of The Velvet Fog, fans have dubbed him “The Mel Tormé of Sweden.”

—John Ephland



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Michaël Attias' new album is a quartet  
project titled *Nerve Dance*.

RUSS ROWLAND

# MICHAËL ATTIAS

## 'Bird Is Like Shakespeare'

On one of his previous Clean Feed albums, 2012's *Spun Tree* (with trumpeter Ralph Alessi, pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Sean Conly and drummer Tom Rainey), alto saxophonist Michaël Attias took a deliberately through-composed approach on exacting pieces like "Ghost Practice," "Subway Fish Knit" and the knotty title track, each brimming with polyphony. His sixth release for the Lisbon, Portugal-based label, *Nerve Dance*, finds Attias exploring more expansive musical terrain with his highly elastic quartet of pianist Aruán Ortiz, bassist John Hébert and drummer Nasheet Waits.

"Some of the greatest, most radical and lasting music in jazz has been blowing sessions," Attias said. "I'm a big fan of those things and wanted to bring some of that energy to this new one, but it's not just a collection of blowing numbers. The compositional agenda is more masked or more imbedded, in a way."

While Attias remains firmly rooted in the avant-grade, one can readily hear the inspiration of Charlie Parker in his fluid lines and familiar cadences on furious blowing vehicles like "Scribble Job Yin Yang" and the intense opener, "Dark Net." "For me, everything is inspired by Bird," said the 48-year-old native of Haifa, Israel, who grew up in Minneapolis and later relocated to Paris before moving to New York City in 1994. "Bird is like Shakespearean literature; everybody after him takes one little bit of it and extends it. Lee Konitz's Bird is the solo on 'Yardbird Suite.' Jimmy Lyons' playing with Cecil Taylor is total Bird. He takes that very nervous, speech-like rhythm and goes over the barline with it, freeing it from a grid. Ornette Coleman's version of 'Klactoveedsedstene' with Paul Bley, Don Cherry, Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins on *Live At The Hilcrest Club* (1958) ... that's just so Bird! Cannonball Adderley does one version of Bird, Eric Dolphy does another, and Anthony Braxton

is constantly addressing Bird throughout his work. He's the big generator of ideas for everybody for generations after him."

What carries the *Nerve Dance* session is the interplay and conversational quality between the four like-minded participants. Hébert, who contributes the lyrical ballad "Rodger Lodge" and the 3/4 tribute to the group's drummer, "Nasheet," is the anchor on *Nerve Dance* while also providing key contrapuntal lines throughout. Ortiz's comping is often unpredictable; his solos cascade freely while Waits underscores the session with a looseness and intuitive brilliance on the kit that elevates the proceedings.

"Nasheet has this kind of melodic rhythm, almost like a Morse code melodic approach to the drums that comes deeply out of bebop," Attias said. "He has that kind of linguistic thing in his playing that Billy Higgins and Max Roach had. And he also has this gift—both he and Aruán—of being able to rebalance from moment to moment, like where there's total commitment to what's happening in every moment of the music. They are constantly balancing it and throwing it off balance, stabilizing and destabilizing the music in this very elastic way that is very intuitive but very grounded."

Since settling in New York more than 20 years ago, Attias has played duets with Braxton and appeared on the 1999 release of Braxton's opera *Trillium R: Composition 162*; gigged at the old Knitting Factory with Anthony Coleman's Self-Haters Orchestra, appearing on two recordings from the late '90s; played the Village Vanguard with Paul Motian's Trio 2000 + Two, and contributed to the late drummer's 2009 album *On Broadway Volume 5*; and collaborated with fellow saxophonist Tony Malaby, bassist Eric Revis and Anthony Coleman.

Attias has also recorded nine albums as a leader, with *Nerve Dance* being the most adventurous and satisfying to date. —Bill Milkowski



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Jon Balke mixes acoustic piano and electronic elements on his new album, *Warp*.



Pianist Jon Balke, who has been a mainstay on the Norwegian jazz scene since the early '70s, continues to pursue new sonic avenues. Early in his career he worked with bassist Arild Andersen, and later co-founded Masqualero with Andersen and drummer Jon Christensen, but his latest outing is a solo effort. The album *Warp* (ECM) finds him adding electronic touches to his acoustic piano in a program of 16 highly original pieces.

"This idea has been growing steadily since I started playing solo piano after so many collaborations," Balke said the day after a solo performance at the 2016 Oslo Jazz Festival. During that performance at the venue Sentralen, Balke used the same approach he took when recording *Warp*, but executed in real time. "The room is never silent; there's always sound happening," he said, referring to both the concert stage and the recording studio. "I wanted to see if I could make sound architecture around the piano. To work in the deep reverb, manipulating that space."

After referring to Paul Bley as "probably my main influence," Balke explained, "I've been working this way with keyboards for a very long time, since the early '80s when I was involved with theater productions. I had the opportunity to fool around with the [Yamaha] DX7 [synthesizer] for a long period, and I suddenly got into working with electronics."

He contrasted the readiness of the piano and what it can do with the "details and longer processes" of working with electronics: "I never felt that I could be a soloist on a synthesizer," he said. "I never felt that connection. Electronics is a supplement."

For *Warp*, Balke first made piano recordings at Rainbow Studios in Oslo. Later he and Audun Kleive went into the Norwegian hills, crafting field recordings with elements of electronics. Eventually, everything was mixed with more recordings at Rainbow. "The trick," Balke noted, "and it can be thought of as a trick in one sense, is to make the additional sounds fit somehow—and yet the source of those sounds has the listener wondering, instead of feeling distracted." Some of the atmospheric sounds on *Warp* include trams, children in a schoolyard and singers heard in the distance, recorded indoors in Istanbul.

Although he uses iPads, samplers and mixers, Balke leaves room for the element of surprise. "It's interesting to have a dialog going on with these environmental sounds," he said. "There are really long stretches with things that I play from the computer. And, I don't know all that is happening; many of the things are random. So, I sometimes get surprises with this kind of dialog. It's an opportunity to open up more spaces in my piano playing."

Balke is planning numerous collaborations for 2017. One project involves dancers, and in another, he will create a sound installation with art objects. Additionally, he will make recordings with the group Batagraf—his "think tank" for percussion, electronics and voice—and with Siwan, a project that mixes Arabic poetry and music with European baroque elements.

In the meantime, he'll be playing music inspired by *Warp* "for a long, long time." He added, "I really want to develop that concept further."

—John Ephland





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Daymé Arocena possesses one of the most boisterous laughs you'll ever hear. Voluminous and sultry, it erupts sporadically in conversation and throughout her music.

When Arocena chuckled during her incantatory rendition of "Cry Me A River" on her 2015 EP, *The Havana Cultura Sessions* (Brownwood), its sardonic rapture hinted at sweet revenge. In other occurrences, her guffaws bristle with joy, as on "Madres"—a funky celebration of the Santería deity Yemaya fueled by African thumb piano and B-3 organ, from her captivating full-length debut, *Nueva Era* (Brownwood)—or the propulsive "Negra Caridad" and the grandiloquent "Elegua," which are on her new album, *Cubafonía* (Brownwood).

"I wish I had a recipe for my laugh to give people," Arocena, 25, said while sipping tea on a January morning at Coppelía in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. Several hours later, she would make her Winter Jazzfest debut at (Le) Poisson Rouge. "When I laugh, I feel free. One of my missions in life is to show people how beautiful it is to laugh."

This native of Havana, Cuba, possesses a vivacious singing voice, too. Her alto proves incredibly expressive across a swath of emotional terrain. Whether she's rhapsodizing about sexual healing or singing praises to Santería saints, Arocena energizes her material with iridescent conviction. Her lissome phrasing, fervent sighs and gale-force wails recall Dianne Reeves' virtuosity and Teena Marie's scorching serenades.

After working with various London-based musicians and delving into 21st-century soul-jazz on her previous releases, *Cubafonía* finds Arocena fronting an all-Cuban large ensemble. The music pulsates to indigenous Afro-Cuban idioms, such as rumba, *changüí* and *guaguancó*.

Arocena, who composed all the songs on *Cubafonía*, explained that being homesick while constantly traveling around the world inspired

much of the music: "I missed the Cuban people in the streets—just talking and laughing with me. It's hard being in [some foreign] countries where people don't talk to you or where people are just scared of life."

Growing up in Havana's Diez de Octubre neighborhood, Arocena's home was constantly filled with rumba records. At age 4, she started trying to imitate Whitney Houston.

Her parents took note and enrolled her at the Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán, where she studied choir conducting for nine years. She also formed an all-female ensemble, Alami. That formal education strengthened Arocena's ear-training as well as music-reading and leadership skills. "Whether the choir is of five people or 500 people, your ears have to be able to feel each individual voice, even when the goal is to make all of them sound as one," she explained.

Arocena began striving for a career as a singer. Although Cuba has a reputation for producing superlative jazz musicians, Arocena encountered sexism as she developed her skills as a composer, singer, pianist and bandleader.

"We have to be perfect and better than the men just to get attention," Arocena said.

Fortunately Alami caught the attention of Canadian saxophonist, flutist and bandleader Jane Bunnett, who's been exploring Afro-Cuban music for more than two decades. Bunnett recruited Arocena and other musicians from Alami, plus drummer Yissy García and bass/tres player Yusa, to form Maqueque. The group's first album, *Jane Bunnett And Maqueque* (Justin Time), won a Juno Award in the category Jazz Album of the Year—Group.

As Arocena's profile continues to ascend, she hopes to inspire other young, Cuban female musicians. "I want power—not to be rich but to inspire," she explained. "I want power to get attention for these young female singers and musicians who are looking for opportunities to develop their talent."

—John Murph



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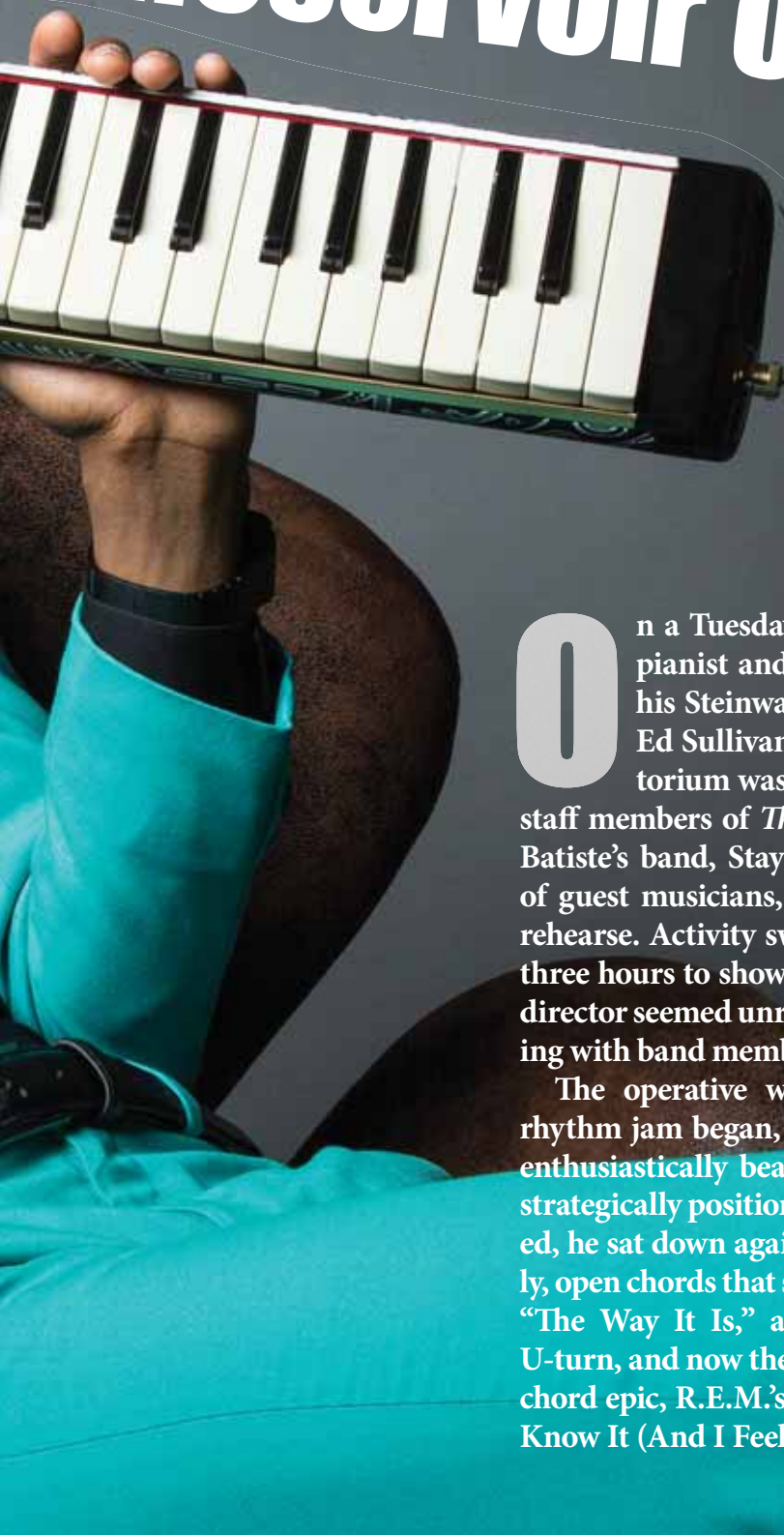


# BATISTE

## 'Reservoir of Positivity'

BY ALLEN MORRISON

PHOTOS BY JIMMY & DENA KATZ



**O**n a Tuesday afternoon in early December, the pianist and bandleader Jon Batiste sat behind his Steinway grand on the stage of New York's Ed Sullivan Theater. The famously chilly auditorium was empty except for a couple of dozen staff members of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. Batiste's band, Stay Human, augmented by a handful of guest musicians, surrounded him as they began to rehearse. Activity swirled around him. It was less than three hours to showtime, but the show's young musical director seemed unruffled, even serene, smiling and joking with band members.

The operative word was "loose." An impromptu rhythm jam began, during which Batiste stood up and enthusiastically beat out time on his own bass drum, strategically positioned to his left. When the jam subsided, he sat down again and played a series of three stately, open chords that soon morphed into Bruce Hornsby's "The Way It Is," as a trumpeter joined in. Another U-turn, and now the band was playing a different three-chord epic, R.E.M.'s "It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)." This was the song they were



Jon Batiste appears on *The Music Of John Lewis*, an album by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Blue Engine will release the album in March.

there to rehearse and record for a comic opening segment to be broadcast later in the week. Soon the other musicians joined in, and the jazz-oriented unit was delivering the high-octane, alt-rock anthem with conviction.

At 3:10 p.m., as the band played, Colbert arrived, suited up for the evening's taping, which would begin at 5:30. When the song eventually aired on Thursday night's show, it was re-titled "It's The End Of The Year As We Know It." Colbert, backed by Stay Human's tracks, would race through updated, semi-apocalyptic lyrics about the newsworthy events of 2016, with R.E.M. lead singer Michael Stipe serving as a comedic (and nearly silent) duet partner.

When Tuesday's rehearsal ended, just as Colbert turned toward his desk on stage right, the band started to play the song again, but this time at a languid tempo, in cool-jazz mode, with boppish asides. Colbert pivoted, a look of mock alarm on his face. "What?!" he shrieked.

Colbert has said he regards what Batiste and the band do as a kind of magic that's beyond his ken, and this little moment suggested his continual surprise and joy at their alchemical abilities. For Batiste, it spoke to the spirit of *play* with which he approaches his job, shape-shifting from one genre of music to another. Batiste chooses a different musical theme for every show. It might be New Orleans funk one night, Bach or Debussy on another; Beatles tunes, or music from a specific decade. Whatever the theme, Batiste and his band perform with an unfailing sense of joy approaching euphoria, in the process spreading the idea that jazz is not forbidding or only for the cognoscenti, but fun and for everybody.

Batiste, 30, has reached the pinnacle of

American show business for a musician by becoming Colbert's sidekick and musical director. At the same time, he is pursuing his own unique vision as a musician and composer with a personal, inclusive concept of what jazz has been and what it still can be.

"You can hear the whole history of jazz piano" in his playing, said pianist and NEA Jazz Master Kenny Barron, who taught Batiste at The Juilliard School. "But also, he's a great entertainer. He seems to have found his sweet spot at *The Late Show*."

Bassist and bandleader Christian McBride noticed Batiste in 2004 when the teenage piano prodigy—whom he still calls Jonathan—came through the Jazz Aspen Snowmass summer program, for which McBride served as artistic director. (Today they both serve as co-artistic directors of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem.) Years later, when Batiste joined trumpeter Roy Hargrove's band, McBride thought it was a great fit. "I knew he was going to have some great training that was really steeped in tradition," McBride said. "The fact that Roy liked Jonathan enough to take him on the road already let me know that the great things I heard in Jonathan's playing were real."

Batiste has been doing an "amazing" job as musical director on *The Late Show*, McBride said. "If you look at Colbert's comedy, and you look at Jon's level of musicianship, as far as I'm concerned, they're at the same level."

Despite his youth, Batiste has paid some dues, cutting his teeth as a sideman for Hargrove, Wynton Marsalis, Abbey Lincoln and Cassandra Wilson, among others, before leading his own groups. Prior to forming Stay Human, he fronted his own piano trio for seven

years with bandmates bassist Phil Kuehn and drummer Joe Saylor, both of whom he had met at Juilliard.

In 2011, after Kuehn had decided to leave the trio and New York, Batiste's response was to create a group with an entirely different concept. Stay Human, with Saylor on drums, Eddie Barbash on alto saxophone and Ibanda Ruhumbika on tuba, became famous for leading New Orleans-style second-line processions through the streets and subways of New York (and later at jazz festivals). Batiste likes to call them "love riots." A key to the band's mobility is Batiste's use of a customized melodica, which he calls a "harmonaboard," and the substitution of tuba for double bass.

His rising fame over the last decade in the New York jazz community, and several appearances on the HBO New Orleans-themed series *Treme*, led to a fateful guest appearance on *The Colbert Report* in July 2014.

"We have a natural chemistry," Batiste reminisced in his office above the Ed Sullivan Theater, which is large enough to house a grand piano and a drum set. "And I realized that at the same moment that he did, which was on *The Colbert Report*. He interviewed me in character—his ultra-right-wing character, which is very much the opposite of how Colbert is. That was the first time we ever spoke to each other.

"So he's interviewing me in character and asking these absurd questions. At one point in the interview I tell him, 'I like to improvise as a musician. And I see you have these cards here. As jazz musicians we don't need cue cards to converse with music.' And he throws the cards away and gets within five inches of my face, and he doesn't break eye contact. And we went into a





kind of performance-art thing, where I'm playing my harmonica and talking to him; he's talking to me and saying things that aren't even questions. It just flowed. Later, he joined our musical performance and started to dance. We went out into the street and did a procession. After that, it was evident there was something there, and I was invited back to the show."

They kept in touch. When Colbert was offered *The Late Show* gig, he called his friend Jon. "We had a brief phone conversation," Batiste recalled. "Later we met to talk about his concept for the show. He talked about the history of late night and his favorite shows ... but he didn't give me musical direction, not before [the show began], or *since*, actually. It's been very open for us to create. I had the sense that he trusted me to take care of the music, and I've found that to be true."

"That Jon is a brilliant musician is self-evident," Colbert said via email. "But if you listen closely to his playing you can also hear the man I've gotten to know—a bottomless reservoir of positivity, reaching for a closer relationship with the audience. He can read a crowd like nobody I know and is always ready to lift the room with his music and give me the energy and opportunity I need to connect with 500 people immediately and millions of people remotely."

Colbert instructed Batiste just to follow his instincts, musically. "That's the beauty of hiring somebody that you trust," Batiste said. "Stephen has a full plate on his end of the spectrum—producing, writing, being the main performer, host and interviewer. Imagine all the different things that go into those roles. You don't want to have to think about producing the music ... on the show every night. He wanted

someone who was aligned with his values and vision. He thought that I was the guy; and I felt the same way. There was no conversation about how we might compare to other [late-night] shows. It was more about finding a whole new energy that works, and figuring out a way to put that into the machine of late-night television. I think we found the energy."

Only once does Batiste remember asking Colbert for his reaction to some musical decisions he made. It happened during the first two weeks of the show's existence. "I was wondering what he thought about the [musical] 'bummers' we had played that night. And he said they were great ... He said something like, 'That's *your* lane. You know it more than I ever could.'" Batiste hasn't asked him since.

Considering his public image as an outgoing entertainer, Batiste's early albums, including *Times In New Orleans* and *Jazz Is Now*, are surprisingly low-key and earnest affairs showcasing his formidable skills as a post-bop pianist, as well as his efforts to integrate historical jazz—including Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer," for instance—into the modern jazz vernacular. His current "looseness" onstage and on Stay Human's 2013 album, *Social Music*, is in contrast to his rigorous preparation for his current gig through years of classical and jazz study.

That preparation included exposure from an early age to serious musicians who became mentors. For one thing, he is a product of one of New Orleans' most famous musical families. At first he was a percussionist, playing the conga drum onstage with The Batiste Brothers Band at age 8, and jamming with his cousins,

who were junior band members. When he was 11, his mother suggested he switch to the piano.

Growing up in Kenner, the New Orleans suburb that is also the home of the Marsalis family, he spent years under the tutelage of a classical piano teacher in nearby Metairie named Shirley Herstein. As he continued his classical studies, he played pop music and, increasingly, jazz, both with the Batiste Brothers and outside the family. He began to investigate jazz at 14, an informal process of finding like-minded peers and mentors, including his distant cousin, Alvin Batiste (1932–2007), the clarinetist and educator who served as jazz director at the New Orleans Center for The Creative Arts, which young Jonathan attended.

"Alvin was my mentor from the time I started playing jazz until I went to New York City at 17. He taught me to understand the difference between something that is 'correct,' versus something that is 'right,' if you catch the vernacular."

Warming to the subject, he explained the difference. "Something is 'correct' if it follows the rules and is, quantifiably, the right thing to do in a given situation. But something that's 'right' doesn't have to be correct. Because if it's right, it's *right*. You feel it—you know when something is right. If it doesn't match up to the 'correct' way, it doesn't matter, if it's *right*."

Batiste also cited the influence of saxophonist Edward "Kidd" Jordan and trumpeter Clyde Kerr Jr., who taught alongside Alvin at the Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong Summer Jazz Camp at Loyola University in New Orleans. "Those three were like the village elders. I learned from all of them."

The young pianist was molded as much by

New York as he was by New Orleans. He had several reasons for coming to the big city: “One was to be on the scene and to form my own band here. Another was so that I could meet, and perform with, some of the musicians whose recordings I had heard in New Orleans, and who I knew lived in New York, like Roy Hargrove.” He recalled that, during his first year at Juilliard, he found himself “almost stalking” Hargrove at the Blue Note and at master classes he gave. “The first time I met him, I snuck into his master class at The New School without an ID, and I ran up to the stage and figured out a way to play with him. I was so excited.” Eventually he accomplished his goal: playing in Hargrove’s band.

The other main reason Batiste came to New York was to study with Barron, who until recently taught at Juilliard. “Alvin Batiste introduced him to me. Kenny appeared on Alvin’s [1993] album *Late*, one of his only major label releases under his own name. He told me how this piano player would come into the studio and was the consummate professional, someone at the highest level of artistry. I started checking out his recordings, like *Live At Maybeck Recital Hall*. That one was a big influence. When I saw that he taught at Juilliard, that was a no-brainer for me.”

Batiste studied with Barron for six years, right up till he left Juilliard with a master’s degree. His weekly lessons with Barron consisted of teacher and pupil playing duets in a room with two grand pianos. “I would walk in early in the morning, 9 or 10, and another player would be walking out, shaking his head in wonder, almost sulking, as if Kenny had just wiped the floor with them. They were like, ‘Man, I just don’t know how I’m ever going to reach that level.’

“So I walk in, he doesn’t say a word. He just starts playing a tune. And either you know it, or you learn it in the course of playing it. One of the pillars of his tutelage was to learn as many songs as you possibly can remember. Then you’ll be able to play songs that you’ve never heard before with greater ease. Most songs operate from the same kind of progressions. If you know a wide body of them, then you’ll understand the logic of how they work together—simple as that. The more you know, the more you *can* know.

“He also stressed the importance of swinging your eighth notes ... even just with your right hand. And learning how to play them continuously and never stop swinging. We’d work on the same song for 30 minutes, trading off lines with only one hand, keeping the swing going, to get a good solid-feeling eighth note. And that is the essence of jazz.”

Batiste also cited the influence of Monk, Duke Ellington (as a pianist), Harry Connick Jr., Marcus Roberts, Eric Lewis (who now goes by the name ELEW) and the New Orleans



piano masters Henry Butler and James Booker.

Occasionally Batiste would become *too* fixated on the style of one of his role models, such as Monk or Booker: “I would have to stop listening to them, to get them out of my head,” he explained. He also cited the critical influence of a non-pianist: Wynton Marsalis. “As Wynton always says, all jazz is modern. He turned me onto the concept that the older styles of jazz can be made modern.”

Batiste never really stopped being a “serious” jazz pianist, but his ideas grew to incorporate an expansive kind of music that embraces current and historical styles and tries to expand the audience for jazz, a concept he calls “social music.”

“In 2011,” he said, “I graduated from Juilliard, and I felt I had evolved from being an apprentice to so many great musicians; I was confident enough to be a leader. As a band-leader, the concept I wanted to drive home was bringing people together—people who wouldn’t be in the same room together if it weren’t for the music.

“That’s the philosophical concept. The musical concept is what I call ‘Jazz 2.0.’” With the Internet helping people to connect instantly and create one global culture, he explained, “we have music that is about the moment. Jazz is the most of-the-moment, modern style of music that there ever was. What’s more modern than ‘right this second’? I’m creating it right in front of you. So, ‘social music’ is about accommodating all of the [musical] influences that are in your world, and making your own

unique blend.”

In the years following Juilliard, Batiste became an increasingly popular draw at jazz festivals, where his energetic performances would draw both hardcore jazz fans as well as those who were new to the music.

Batiste’s joyful onstage persona, on display on national TV every night, is part of his message. Far from being a shtick, it reflects his true personality: “Just as Louis Armstrong did, as Dizzy Gillespie and Ellington did ... your stage persona gives people another entry point to the music. If you have a charismatic personality, people can find ways to relate to the music through you. It has to be authentic, though.”

Thanks to Batiste, *The Late Show* has featured more jazz artists than is common on late-night TV. “We’ve already had Roy Haynes on, Arturo Sandoval, Wayne Shorter, Jimmy and Tootie Heath,” he said. “But we’re doing it in a way that aligns with the greater vision of the show, which is about not just jazz, but the world and current events—and jazz is represented in that, for once.”

Batiste thinks that the cumulative effect of having a jazz band like Stay Human on the show every night over years “will impact the jazz community in ways that we can’t even imagine. I think our era is just becoming aware enough, and interested enough, for jazz to make a resurgence, but in the modern context. The jazz community is too segmented and too insular. We need to embrace the world around us—those who are fans of the music but don’t know it yet.”

DB



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Reggie Workman

Andrew Cyrille



Oliver Lake





# Trio 3

## SURVIVAL SYNDROME

BY TED PANKEN | PHOTOS BY STEVEN SUSSMAN

Around 1:30 p.m. on Aug. 13, the hottest, most humid day of 2016, drummer Andrew Cyrille and alto saxophonist Oliver Lake, two-thirds of the collective unit Trio 3, sat patiently in the cool confines of Peter Karl Studios in Brooklyn. The premises had been booked until 4:30 for a second day of sessions intended to generate the group's seventh album for the Swiss label Intakt. Bassist Reggie Workman was delayed due to unforeseen weekend subway reschedulings and multiple incorrect instructions from transit personnel. Trio 3 had been quite productive the preceding day: Lake's "Bonu" and "Stick" and Cyrille's "7 For Max"—a solo-drum-set tribute to Max Roach—were already in the can. But four tunes were yet to be recorded, including a logistically complex Workman opus that involved having him switch off seamlessly between bass and several tuned metal gongs.

After his three-hour nightmare through the subway looking glass, Workman, 79, arrived at 2:30, frazzled and aggravated. He let off steam, drank a bottle of water and began to warm up. By 2:50, he announced himself ready to address Ornette Coleman's "A Girl Named Rainbow," set to a poem by the late Jayne Cortez. Lake, 74, and Cyrille, 77, positioned themselves and put on their headphones. After a few run-throughs, Lake and Workman, guided by Cyrille's precise, calmly stated instructions, nailed down the nuances of their parts, and got a satisfactory take. It took another half-hour to wrap Cyrille's "Epic Man," a tune dedicated to Workman.

"Our time is running out," Lake observed. He suggest-

ed they play an open improvisation before tackling Workman's "Visiting Texture." Ten minutes later, they'd conjured a cogent, lovely tabula rasa invention. They immediately turned their attention to Workman's piece, which involved an alto sax-arco bass unison, followed by a percussion section on which Workman addressed the gongs with a saw. During the first attempt, Workman was dissatisfied with the way he struck the gong.

"Explain what you want, Reggie, then let's do a take," Lake said.

Engineer Karl inquired, "Do you want to hit it or quit it?"

"Never quit," Workman replied. Ten minutes later, just before 5 o'clock, Trio 3 had concluded its first studio album without a chordal instrument since its Intakt debut, 2006's *Time Being*.

"These guys are warriors with the classic iron constitution," said pianist Vijay Iyer, who collaborated with Trio 3 on the 2014 album *Wiring*. Iyer recalled that during that session, after five hours of constant work, the trio of septuagenarians seemed surprised at his suggestion that they take a lunch break. "Their stamina, determination and grit, their trust in the process, their patience and sure-footedness come from wisdom and years of work—you trust each other's actions and choices, and are laser-focused on the moment and making everything work, no matter what happens. In the course of performance, something unforeseen happens, but you make something that not only salvages it but makes it great."

"Apart from each member being a virtuoso on their instrument and an institution in their own right, they are composition-driven," said pianist Geri Allen. "It's a wonderful mix of fixed ideas and completely open, spontaneous ideas." Allen collaborated with Trio 3 on *In This Game* and *Celebrating Mary Lou Williams: Live At Birdland, New York*. Soon after she arrived in New York in 1982, Lake retained her services for the albums *Plug It, Expandable Language, Gallery* and *Impala*; Cyrille played drums on her 1984 debut, *The Printmakers*.

The always eloquent Allen praised Lake's "creative choices as saxophonist and poet," his "steadfast projection of a clear sense of inner knowing through each resolute phrase"; Workman's "connection to the music of the spheres and transcendence of traditional technique"; and Cyrille's "staunch modernism" while displaying "the same devotion to folklore and tradition."

The following group interview with the members of Trio 3 took place after the recording session in a noisy Brooklyn restaurant.

**THIS WILL BE TRIO 3'S FIRST ALBUM WITHOUT A PIANIST SINCE 2006. DO THOSE PROJECTS REQUIRE A DIFFERENT PROCESS THAN WHEN YOU RECORD AS JUST THE THREE OF YOU?**

**Andrew Cyrille:** Of course. You have to include the other voice. We write music that they can play, and we played some of their music.

**Reggie Workman:** The idea is to find a chordal person whose concept isn't dogmatic, but can be loose enough to encompass what we're doing and maneuver within our space—and for us to do the same for that person. Geri, Vijay, Jason [Moran], Irène [Schweizer], everyone we've dealt with has their own way of being, a particular character in their music. It's a nice junction, a nice matrix.

**YOU'VE PLAYED TOGETHER AS A TRIO AT LEAST SINCE THE LATE 1980S.**

**AC:** It started with Reggie's group, Top Shelf, and even on projects before that.

**Oliver Lake:** Reggie started hiring Andrew and me in his different projects. Then Andrew started hiring Reggie and me in his projects. I started hiring Reggie and Andrew on my projects. We did it so much, we decided it made sense for us to have one group. It was a business decision, but also a musical decision.

**OLIVER, AS THE "YOUNGSTER" IN THE GROUP, WHO DIDN'T GET TO NEW YORK UNTIL 1974, PRESUMABLY YOU KNEW ABOUT ANDREW AND REGGIE BEFORE THEY KNEW ABOUT YOU.**

**OL:** That's true. Reggie was on the road with Art Blakey when I met him in California. Andrew and I met in Toulon, [France], at

Lake (left), Workman and Cyrille have recorded a new studio album, which Intakt will release on March 17.



some point around 1972, when he was with Cecil Taylor. When I got to New York, we kept crossing paths. It was exciting to be playing with someone as skilled and knowledgeable as Andrew, and it was great to share the stage with Reggie, whose recordings I'd heard growing up, a monster bass player with a monster sound.

**AC:** Cecil, Jimmy Lyons and I were playing on a big stage in Toulon. Archie Shepp was there and Jackie McLean with Michael Carvin. Oliver was playing a little distance away in a gazebo with the Black Artists Group [BAG]; there was Lester Bowie, Baikida Carroll, Bobo Shaw. Jimmy and I decided to go over and hear what these cats were doing. That's when I first saw him. Later we did something in Nickelsdorf, [Austria], with Hans Falb.

Reggie and I met in Brooklyn—Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights—at the end of '50s. Cedar Walton was living in the neighborhood, Freddie Hubbard, Slide Hampton ... Did you play at the Turbo Village?

**RW:** Of course. I played there with Gigi Gryce.

**AC:** I led a band at the Turbo Village when they opened. Freddie Hubbard was in the band, Sadik Hakim, Al Doctor and Leroy Standard.

**RW:** Louis Hayes was in the neighborhood, too. There were clubs around Brooklyn where you could work, and the music community was thriving. That created a matrix for you to listen and see who was in tune with your concept of music.

**VERY FEW COLLECTIVE GROUPS STAY TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS. WHAT ATTRIBUTES MAKE IT DESIRABLE FOR YOU TO PLAY WITH EACH OTHER?**

**AC:** I love Reggie's sound. I love his ability to create. I love his intelligence, and his desire to continue to learn and give me what I'm asking for. Often I have to practice and think over

and over about things he wants me to do, until it gets to a comfortable point. The same with Oliver's stuff.

**RW:** I'll start with Oliver, whom I briefly encountered in St. Louis when traveling with Yusef Lateef, with Freddy Cole, with Max Roach and Abbey [Lincoln]. The encounter was brief. When he came to New York, I recognized him as an industrious person with his own sound, who was building his musical character. That impressed me. I also remember seeing Andrew around New York earlier, when I realized the intelligence of his music and his projection, the way he treated time and rhythm.

**THE ROOTS OF THIS BAND DATE TO A DEVELOPMENT DURING THE '70S, WHEN MUSICIANS FROM CHICAGO, ST. LOUIS AND LOS ANGELES BROUGHT IDEAS TO THE NEW YORK AVANT-GARDE AND EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC COMMUNITY. "LOFT JAZZ," IT WAS CALLED. HYBRIDS DEVELOPED THAT REMAIN PART OF THE MUSICAL LANDSCAPE TODAY.**

**AC:** The lofts were where musicians would get together. I heard Oliver's early records, and wondered how he put together his compositions. The same as when I'd listened to Gigi Gryce and those cats. How did they do that? In New York, people from different regions learn from each other, and we cross-fertilize. You get another product that's as strong or even stronger than the roots. A lot of musicians didn't want to be part of this stuff. They said, "I'm still trying to play bebop; these cats are doing some other shit, and I don't want to do that because they can't even play." But it ain't about that. It's about you wanting to learn and wanting to expand. You can't make a contribution and keep the music moving forward if you continue to do what the people before you did.

**OL:** With the BAG in St. Louis and the AACM in Chicago, it was about being open to all styles of music, and not being afraid to experiment



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Trio 3 acknowledges the applause at Chicago venue The Hideout in 2010.

and explore the things that you love, regardless of genre. That's the way I shaped my career, by working with reggae and steel pans and big bands and string quartets, being open to the different elements of sound—a bit of bebop, a bit of open improvisation, strings, big bands, working with orchestras. I think of my music as ambidextrous. You can sit still and listen, or you can dance and pop your fingers.

**REGGIE, I'M INTERESTED IN HOW THIS PERIOD AFFECTED YOUR PATH AS A MUSICIAN. YOU'D PLAYED WITH JOHN COLTRANE, ART BLAKEY, MAX ROACH, MILES DAVIS, AND WERE QUITE ESTABLISHED IN THE JAZZ MAINSTREAM.**

**RW:** But I was coming from that same area of thought. During the '60s and '70s, everywhere I'd go, musicians who had lived a lot with the music of past contributors were developing their own ways of making music. You'd say, "I like this idea; I can learn a lot from it—what can I do with this personally?" and look into the possibilities. You'd develop ideas, develop your chops to execute them, and you'd create jobs by putting together groups and venues, so that it became part of your livelihood as well as your artistic endeavor.

**AC:** I played traditional music with all kinds of people—jam sessions in Brooklyn and in Harlem at Count Basie's and Wells, etc. Everybody was playing bebop, so you had to learn how to do that. If you want to play with someone like Kenny Dorham or Hank Mobley and you can't play "Confirmation," you ain't in it.

I'd play "Hurry on down to my house, baby; anybody home but me" with Nellie Lutcher. She taught me how to play in 2/2. After her, I worked with Illinois Jacquet and Mary Lou Williams and [Babatunde] Olatunji. I told Mary Lou I'd like to play the ride beat in a different way. She'd say, "You can, but you'll never get any work." After I met Cecil, I was able to take all the stuff I had, bring it to the table,

and do it any way I wanted. From there, I was able to branch out and do things that were different. When you find people who don't mind doing that with you, you move in that direction. Max Roach told me something once at Smalls Paradise. After he played, I said, "Damn, Max, you played everything. You played some shit that nobody ever played before." He said, "Well, no, I didn't. This is a universe. All you've got to do is go out and find it."

**IN WHAT WAY IS TRIO 3 DISTINCT FROM THE OTHER PROJECTS YOU WORK WITH?**

**OL:** It's a great vehicle for me to express myself as a composer and improviser, supported by a great drummer and a great bass player, and be totally heard because it's just the three of us.

**AC:** Everybody wouldn't want to play my music, and everybody isn't so gifted as to be able to play what I want. But Trio 3 is special. I can write anything, and they'll try to play it for me. I can always rely on them.

**REGGIE, ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT THE PERSONALITIES OF YOUR PARTNERS WHEN YOU BRING IN A PIECE?**

**RW:** Of course. My idea is bring things in where the idea of the song is established on the paper, and to present all the elements without it sounding written. It's a helluva feat to do that without using the usual formulas. There also have to be places within the music for the musicians to present what they are going to bring to the beach. It doesn't make sense to assign so much to strong, powerful improvisers that they never have a chance to contribute or think for themselves.

**YOU'RE ALL IN YOUR SEVENTIES, AND YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW.**

**AC:** Tomorrow ain't even here. We're thinking about today. When you think about the future, the future never arrives! The future has to do

with work. If we can get work, we'll play more. That means people have to want to employ us.

**THIS SESSION TRANSPIRED UNDER CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES. BUT I SAW THE THREE OF YOU ADDRESS THE SITUATION IN A CALM, MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL WAY, AND COME IN UNDER THE WIRE. WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO THAT 15 OR 20 YEARS AGO?**

**OL:** What happened today is rare [laughs]. Normally we have full time at all of our sessions. But we're all creative enough to know that we had to come through regardless. We would have done that 25 years ago, and we did it today.

**AC:** We're not perfect. Oliver has written compositions that stumped me, and we didn't play them because I couldn't play them the way he wanted. But we respect that. I've written some stuff that's a problem for him to play. Same thing for Reggie, but sometimes, if we're in the studio and there's something he can't get, he'll go back and overdub it, over and over, until he gets what I want. Sometimes the problem is technical, sometimes it's understanding the concept. The problem is never spiritual.

**RW:** We have always pulled these things together. That's where we come from. Our survival syndrome is to be able to pull things like this together and be able to make something out of nothing. I think we learned that from the time we began.

**WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE? IS IT AMERICAN? EUROPEAN? YOU'VE MOSTLY RECORDED FOR EUROPEAN LABELS.**

**AC:** Both. It's people who get the opportunity to hear the music, and like what they hear. They're usually in their thirties-forties-fifties, and want to hear something different. This isn't ear candy that people can talk over and have dinner to. Listen to the sound in this restaurant. If we were playing in this place right now, there would be total silence. I'd hit the drum or play something, or Oliver would play something, or Reggie would play something, and they would stop. If they didn't want to listen, they would leave. But most of the people, if they stayed in here, would continue to listen.

**RW:** There are people who have been listening to this music for so long that they have heard just about everything we can make, that we have made—and they are waiting for something new and fresh to happen to inspire them. They are the best critics and analysts of our music. There are many minds in the world. We have to continue to be strong enough to bring the music to those minds, and continue to be nurtured and nourished by what they reflect back to us. That is our food. That's our payment and that's our inspiration for continuing to create. **DB**





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Otis Taylor performs in Chicago on Dec. 21, 2013. (Photo: ©Paul Natkin/Photo Reserve, Inc.)





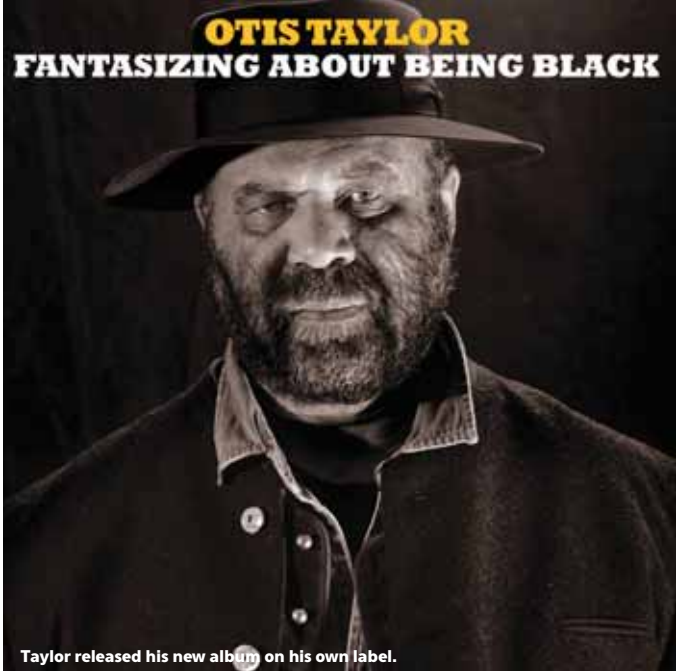
# 'TRIUMPH IS THE KEY'

Otis Taylor

By Jeff Johnson | Photo by Paul Natkin

**T**here's a new sheriff in Bluestown: strong, outspoken, uncompromising, black hat, raging attitude and 15 bigotry-stopping CDs in his bandolier. Otis Taylor is a bluesman for all seasons, but especially for this turbulent winter. He doesn't write songs with the usual "she done me wrong" banalities or "ain't that a man" braggadocio. His narratives, while tempered with hope and homespun spirituality, are set on the grim side of the street. They explore slavery, historical injustices, tyranny, the oppression of people of color and the perils of interracial romance.

These tough, cerebral story-songs are delivered on a musical platform with underpinnings in the North Mississippi hill country fife-and-drum tradition and field hollers based on repetition and a lack of chord changes. Taylor often eschews the hook-friendly structure of the Delta blues. A publicist helped him coin the term "trance blues" to describe his sound, and he has fully embraced the moniker.



Taylor has enjoyed widespread critical acclaim, topping the Blues Album category of the DownBeat Critics Poll five times.

Still, he has heard the murmurs of self-appointed musical guardians, some of whom run record labels and book blues festivals, that his music is not really blues at all, but some type of folk-rock hybrid.

"I'm at the point I don't care anymore" about such criticism, he said. "It's a badge of honor because I'm not being like anybody else."

He offers a more measured view through a quote that appears in the liner notes for his new album: "The folk thing was about civil rights. ... Folk music is the music of the working class, the music of the folks. Blues is folk music."

Denver-based cornetist Ron Miles, who has played on 10 of Taylor's albums, said his music builds on but is not bound by black history. "He's a true member of that great songwriting tradition that goes from Robert Johnson and Bessie Smith all the way through Prince," Miles said. "He understands the history, but the idea is not to wallow in adversity but to triumph over it. That triumph is the key to great blues artists always, and he's a part of that."

Some fans might be puzzled by the title of Taylor's new album, *Fantasizing About Being Black*. But the African-American artist noted that he's not the one doing the fantasizing.

"It might be the fantasy of some white people," Taylor explained. "We [African-Americans] would get boom boxes or wear dashikis, and white people might do the same thing. It's like, Elvis Presley was the king of rock 'n' roll. How did that happen?"

"The album is about being black. You can fantasize about being black, but you have to go through a lot of shit to be black. I could say, 'Wouldn't it be cool to go back to the 7th century?' But when you get there, you might not be able to handle the stench."

Turning back the clock 14 centuries for an analogy might be extreme even for Taylor, but the raconteur often uses timeless themes in his social commentary. More than half the songs on *Fantasizing About Being Black* are told from a historical perspective, rather than ripped-from-the-headlines topics, such as the recent protests against police brutality.

Fans who pay attention to the lyrics on *Fantasizing* will hear a message of hope. On "Tripping On This," a man discovers the long-lost son who was put up for adoption. On "Roll Down The Hill," a black man who feels life has pushed him down finds the will to climb back up.

Four songs on the new disc previously appeared on at least one other Taylor album. "I didn't have enough new songs to fill out an album," he joked. He then laughed and added, "No, I wanted to use those songs for this thing. They're great songs." One of the re-recorded tunes, "Jump Jelly Belly," recounts the plight of a black soldier in World War II. "The troops unloaded cargo on the open seas and had to jump between two ships," Taylor writes in the liner notes. "Falling would mean being crushed between the ships. A soldier nicknamed Jelly Belly, who was afraid to jump, inspired yells of 'Jump Jelly Belly.'"

In lieu of printed lyrics in the CD booklet, Taylor includes brief comments and back-stories. It's one of many ways that he defies convention.

"Otis is a spokesman for his own unique perspective on the world," said violinist Anne Harris, who has recorded and toured with Taylor for nearly a decade. "He's a great storyteller and he does it in a unique way."

That's not to say Taylor avoids politics. Speaking by phone from his home near Boulder, Colorado, a week before President Trump's inauguration, he was having trouble coming to grips with the election of a candidate who had often offended minorities.

While Taylor often dons a wide-brimmed black hat or baseball cap at his shows, don't expect to see him in a certain red cap anytime soon. "We're going way back," he said, referring to President Trump's plans. "It's really 'make America white again'—not 'great.'"

Of *Fantasizing*, he said, "This could be one of the more important albums made this year. I'd trade every one of these songs, though, for a different outcome in the election. People get suppressed all over the

world. This is an album where I stayed straight on this theme. I started this two years ago. I didn't know about Trump ... or the Republican white supremacists when I started working on it."

Taylor isn't shy about expressing his opinion, but he's a *doer*, not an ideologue. His Trance Blues Jam Festival, which has been held annually in Boulder since 2010, is a forum for music education as well as a kind of fantasy camp for aspiring musicians. Even the most casual guitar picker or harp blower can play with and learn from seasoned professionals, including his bassist daughter Cassie, in intimate workshop settings. Then the teachers take over for the evening concerts.

It's the same activist spirit that led him to coach one of the top U.S. amateur bicycle racing teams in the 1980s. "I was so active that I was losing a fortune," he said with a laugh. "I worked three years for free, mostly because I was sponsoring black kids and helping blacks race."

As a coach, and now as a bandleader, Taylor has earned a reputation as a demanding taskmaster. "I'm in charge of everything," he said. "When you're on the road, you can't have five people arguing about food every night or you'll never get to the restaurant. We have a mantra: 'It's all about Otis.' I pay 'em as good as I can pay 'em, and I always give 'em a chance to shine onstage. And when it's time for somebody to solo, the entire group is 100 percent behind that solo."

"We're like the [Harlem] Globetrotters. I know how important it is to put on a good show for people who are paying their hard-earned money. It's part of the black culture. Some of the people I respect most are Charley Pride and Sammy Davis Jr."

Harris—who has been known to twirl across the stage in a tutu, her golden braids flying—provides a strong visual element at Taylor's concerts. "Anne kicks my ass onstage half the time, but I come back at her," Taylor said.

But if there are any cutting contests going on, Harris didn't admit it. "Otis and his music are the focal points, and my role is to uplift and support his music," she said. "I'm not ashamed to make a fool of myself."

Many fans discovered the bluesman through *Public Enemies*, director Michael Mann's 2009 film about John Dillinger. Taylor's "Ten Million Slaves" was used to set the mood for Pretty Boy Floyd's violent demise in a memorable early scene, and his banjo dominated the score.

As a career boost, *Public Enemies* "helped me a bit," Taylor said. "There are different levels of success: how much money you've got, how much exposure. It's all part of a package. People who played with me [Jason Moran and Corey Harris] got the MacArthur fellowships. I got the Michael Mann award. [But] they got more money, I think."

The song "Ten Million Slaves" sold 110,000 units on iTunes, Taylor noted. Recorded first for 2001's *Respect The Dead*, he later re-recorded it



for his 2008 album *Recapturing The Banjo*. The latter disc was one of nine Taylor released on Telarc International, culminating in 2013's *My World Is Gone*. But when he made the psychedelic-tinged *Hey Joe Opus/Red Meat* in 2015, Telarc took a pass. Taylor shrugged off the setback and started his own label, the Boulder-based Trance Blues Festival LLC.

"I had to because I lost the deal with Telarc," he said. "My sales were really low in America. They're much better in Europe. ... I made a lot of money for Telarc. But when they made the decision, I understood. It's all about numbers."

"It isn't going to stop me. I'm making more money now. We keep it very sparse [at Trance Blues]; it's only for me, it's not for other artists. Whenever I did a record, I always took care of everything—the artwork, the packaging. ... I produced the records. I learned always to be moving forward, looking for different things."

Taylor, who in addition to vocals has played acoustic and electric guitar, mandolin, banjo and harmonica on his albums, has a core group of Harris, drummer Larry Thompson and bassist Todd Edmunds.

While he felt the songs on *Fantasizing* required a more stripped-down, acoustic approach, he gracefully integrated contributions from Miles, Jerry Douglas (who plays a lap guitar on two tracks) and 13-year-old electric guitarist Brandon Niederauer.

Miles noted that recording with the trance blues artist is far different from the albums he makes with his jazz trio, which includes guitarist Bill Frisell and drummer Brian Blade. "In my trio, a lot of times I bring music that includes charts," Miles said. "With Otis, it's more a case of him bringing a concept and going from there. He'll tell me, 'Make it sound like a marching band.' Or he'll want me to make my horn sound like an entire trumpet section sometimes; we'll work in an overdub mode."

Taylor's life's journey began in the blues capital of Chicago. His uncle was killed when a craps game went awry, and 4½-year-old Otis and his family were relocated by his grandmother to the comparative safety of Denver. His dad, a traveling railroad worker, and his mom separated but never divorced.

On "Mama's Selling Heroin," from his 2004 album *Double V*, Taylor sings about his mother spending a year in the state penitentiary in the 1950s for dealing drugs. His father soon moved to Denver to care for the children. Taylor noted he has never been a drug user himself.

"I'm from a subterranean family," he said. "My father smoked pot. Everybody smoked pot. I have no fascination about doing drugs because when I was around drugs, what I remember is that my parents kept me up all weekend because they partied all the time."

At age 14, Otis first found refuge in music thanks to Harry Tuft, founder of the Denver

Folklore Center. "He taught me how to play music for free," Taylor said. "That was a place where I could go and play all the instruments on the wall. It was a special place."

A 1964 Denver Post photo reproduced on his website shows a 16-year-old Taylor riding his unicycle to school while playing the banjo.

Within a few years, he was gigging as a bassist in guitarist Tommy Bolin's blues-rock band Zephyr and later re-teamed with Bolin in T&O Short Line. Growing tired of the music business, he quit in 1977 to open an antiques

and art store in Boulder. Nearly 20 years later, bassist Kenny Passarelli and other Boulder-area friends encouraged him to start performing again. The result was 1996's *Blue-Eyed Monster*, the first of his 15 solo albums.

With a rigorous touring schedule and the support of his wife, Carol, the 68-year-old Taylor plans to carry on as a musician. And he makes no concessions to age.

"You get tired, but you still have to go on," he said. "You take work when you get it. I have to set the standard for endurance."

DB

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# Akua Dixon

# PLAYING


# WITH POWER

BY DAN OUELLETTE | PHOTO BY MARK SHELDON

**A**t January's Jazz Connect conference in New York, a panel titled "Jukebox Jury From the Inside Out" convened, consisting of five radio programmers from across the country who appraised whether a piece of music was worthy to be played on-air at their stations. These critiques were based on a random 30-second excerpt from an upcoming recording. The programmers expressed a diverse array of opinions, ranging from keeping the jazz canon unblemished to letting new voices and new sounds be heard. About halfway through the session, a short solo cello piece was played, much to the dismay of most of the panelists, who said they would definitely not play this music on their shows.

In the audience about 30 rows back, Akua Dixon listened to her sublime cello solo segment of her original composition "Orion's Gait" (playful and swinging in its full form as a quartet number), which appears on her compelling new album, *Akua's Dance*. After the panel ended, Dixon shrugged and graciously said, "Well, it's interesting to hear the different points of view." As she was leaving the room, several attendees—bookers, radio programmers, fans—rushed up to her and asked for her card.

Two days later, sitting in her luthier's living room on the Upper West Side (the walls in Lukasz Wronski's multi-room apartment are lined from floor to ceiling with an array of stringed instruments), Dixon was a bit more diplomatic, then feisty about what had taken place. "You can't be thin-skinned to have the career I've had," she said. Her lengthy résumé includes a stint playing in pit bands at the Apollo Theater (for James Brown, Barry White and Dionne Warwick, among others), performing in pit bands on Broadway (for shows such as *Liza with a Z*, *Cats* and *Dream Girls*), tours with Max Roach's bebopping Double Quartet and Archie Shepp's Attica Blues Big Band, co-founding the groundbreaking Quartette Indigo and recording three albums as a leader.









"I don't expect everyone on this planet to like my music, just like some people hate Italian or Chinese food," she said. "But my cello playing has certainly been documented. I started recording in the late '60s, [and I've] showed what I can do on the cello."

And her reaction to the Jazz Connect panel? "I don't think they know what they're talking about," she adamantly said. "These people program music with saxophones, trumpets, guitars, organs, even vibraphones. Maybe violin, but otherwise no strings. The arco cello is not common to their ears. The instrument is in the same range as a tenor saxophone, but the fact that it's stroked with a bow and the way you manipulate notes is very different than a tenor sax. The public ear for listening to cello jazz has to grow."

Even so, Dixon wonders if widespread cello awareness will ever come to pass, given that she's observed most music schools eliminating strings from their orchestras. A stringed instrument pioneer, Dixon is celebrated for her work on cello, but on *Akua's Dance* she also plays the cello's cousin, the baritone violin, on seven of 10 tracks in a quartet with nylon-string guitarist Freddie Bryant, bassist Kenny Davis and drummer Victor Lewis.

While the baritone has the same tuning as a cello, it offers a larger, deeper sound. "Not very many people have seen it," Wronski said.

"When I posted its picture on Facebook, a lot of people thought it was a Suzuki bass for a child," Dixon recalled. "But it was built by [the late luthier] Carleen Hutchins, who wanted the violin sound to go all the way through the string family. It's the first one she built, and I've owned it since 1989. I have long hands and long fingers so I can play it with power."

On *Akua's Dance*, she plays the baritone on her medium-tempo arrangement of Sade's 1985 hit "The Sweetest Taboo" and on the rumbling original "Don't Stop," which closes the style-shifting program.

Although Dixon recently moved into a cathedral-ceiling country home she bought in Rhinebeck in the upper Hudson Valley of New York, her roots are straight-up New York City. She was born in Harlem and her family moved to the Bronx when she was 6. She played piano by ear in her Baptist church. "At that time, everyone had a piano in their living room," she recalled. "We bought sheet music at Schirmer's in Midtown, then went home and practiced."

While her older sister Gayle (1947–2008) played violin, Akua gravitated to the cello for its tone quality. They both went to an elementary school that focused on the arts so that they spent half the day studying music and half the day in academics. By the time she was in junior high, Dixon was already freelancing and then attended the High School of Performing Arts, where she focused on composition and furthering her prowess on cello. (She later attended the Manhattan School of Music.) After classical gigs, the '60s jazz scene came calling. "That's when jazz musicians wanted to start using strings and experimenting with play-

ers who knew the root of the African-American jazz tradition," she said. "There were plenty of European classical music players who were stylized, but they didn't get the rhythm of jazz. Since I grew up in the Baptist church, I had a flair for that so I started freelancing for Latin groups on the Fania label and jazz people like Archie Shepp."

Her Apollo Theater pit spots at one point ballooned into as many as 23 shows a week. She fully embraced jazz and the realms of improvisational possibilities when she linked up with the Symphony of the New World, formed by activist musicians who performed works by such jazz artists as Duke Ellington. In the early '70s, Dixon moved into an influential role in violinist Noel Pointer's String Reunion, a 30-piece African-American orchestra. "Noel was the idea guy who wanted to play classical as well as African-American music," she said. "My sister, who thought like a lawyer, became president; Noel was vice president. Maxine Roach became secretary/treasurer, and since I voiced concern that we needed to encourage new compositions by black writers, I became director of new music. We were young and had a lot of energy."

The remnants of that group, including Gayle and Maxine, were enlisted by Max Roach for his Double Quartet in the early '80s. "That's where I studied bebop with one of the founders," she said. "He'd rehearse us from 9 to 5 every day. He played fast and he wanted the string phrasing to be fast. He'd record every session on a cassette, then play it back so that we could get those rhythmic hits. We did it." The Double Quartet led to Dixon later forming Quartette Indigo, which recorded two string-quartet albums, 1994's *Quartette Indigo* and 1997's *Afrika! Afrika!*

As a burgeoning arranger, Dixon scored several Broadway gigs, which eventually led to her arranging and orchestrating two of pop music's biggest hits in the late '90s: Lauryn Hill's landmark album *The Miseducation Of Lauryn Hill* and Aretha Franklin's comeback disc, *A Rose Is Still A Rose*. Dixon said she enjoyed a mutual-respect working relationship with Hill: "Lauryn was hearing something. Typically when artists want to use strings, they go to the New York Philharmonic, but they couldn't do reggae. So I came in and orchestrated in a certain way that gave her the opportunity to have her dream string section. I'm not a hip-hopper, but I am a musician who keeps her ears open."

Instead of playing Broadway or touring, Dixon took a hiatus from the scene to stay at home (Montclair, New Jersey) to raise her and (now ex-husband) trombonist Steve Turre's two children, Andromeda and Orion. "You make a sacrifice as a parent," she said. "I wanted to educate my children. I didn't expect the school to educate them. School supplements what you teach at home."

Dixon didn't record as a leader of her own group until 2011, saying that people at her infrequent shows were requesting her originals in addition to her classical repertoire. She recorded the string-fueled *Moving On*, and followed that with *Akua Dixon*, a quartet-oriented album that enlisted old violinist friend John Blake Jr. and featured Regina Carter. (Dixon said linking up with her was "major for me after losing my sister Gayle.")

Notable jazz cello pioneers include Oscar Pettiford, who played cello (albeit in bass tuning), and Ron Carter, whose 1961 debut album, *Where?*, was largely a cello-infused affair. Dixon explained that "going from being a classical cellist to a jazz cellist is a journey. One of the things I had to learn was how to use the instrument to make my music dance. As a front player, I knew that playing in an African-American setting, people were going to want to get up and dance."

She also noted that, just as the Jazz Connect panel had indicated, many listeners eschew low-end string instruments in a solo setting. In other words, they're better heard live than on the radio. That has proved to be a major challenge. "How do you record the cello when it's not just a background instrument?" she said. "You want to hear its timbre acoustically on a recording. Thankfully the recording process has become better as a craft. Times change, and hopefully ears grow as a result."

With *Akua's Dance*, the leader has pivoted from the string quartet zone to a standard quartet of guitar, bass and drums. In a standard string



quartet, the cello serves as the bass voice, which limits her ability to fly free with her improvisational skills. "Playing with two different rhythm sections is such a joy," she said, noting that three of her songs on the album feature guitarist Russell Malone, bassist Ron Carter and drummer Lewis. "I'm out in front as opposed to being in a section."

What's remarkable about *Akua's Dance* is the variety of music in the program, including a Dizzy Gillespie tribute, "Dizzy's Smile"; the ballad "If My Heart Could Speak To You," penned by her college classmate Aziza Miller; a moving rendition of Abbey Lincoln's "Throw It All Away" (on which Dixon contributes vocals); and the deeply soulful spiritual "I'm Gonna Tell God All My Troubles," arranged by Bryant, who brought the tune to the session based on a jazz string trio gig he did with Dixon and Davis in upstate New York.

"I like working with cellists because it complements the guitar; it's warm," Bryant said in a phone conversation. "Akua and I are very similar in our backgrounds, coming from classical and jazz. We're also deeply rooted in the African-American spirituals of church music." His connection to "I'm Gonna Tell God All My Troubles" is deep: As documented on YouTube, his mother, opera star Beatrice Rippy, sang the spiritual at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in 1974, accompanied by her renowned pianist/husband Carroll Hollister. So he was the perfect choice to arrange the piece for the quartet.

"I grew up with spirituals," Dixon said. "My family is from the South Carolina/Georgia region and the islands, where there's the Geechee people, who have preserved the African cultural heritage. Where there was the brothel music of the brass bands in New Orleans, the history of my culture is grounded in the spirituals that were played by strings and banjo. It's a different kind of music from a different region. I see it as my responsibility to express that and to pass it on."

On *Akua's Dance*, when Dixon lined up the other quartet with Carter and Malone, she focused on the cello as opposed to the baritone violin she played on the other tracks. Asking Carter to play the low end on the album was key because she wanted to play a classic ballad and take a solo just like a saxophonist. She had run into the bass legend at an event a few years ago—they had worked together briefly on Shepp's 1972 album, *The Cry Of My People*—and he asked her what she had been up to. She sent him her first two albums. When it came time to plan for the third, she asked him if he'd be interested. "Ron is the bass player of all bass players," she said. "So I stepped outside the comfort zone to play at such a high level with him. He said yes, then asked me to send him the music. He came in so prepared. He took care of business."

One of the new album's highlights is

Dixon's powerful "Afrika! Afrika!," based on a three-movement composition for solo cello and string orchestra she wrote after traveling to Ghana in 1972. She had recorded it previously with Quartette Indigo, but she knew what was missing in the arrangement: a stalwart bass line. On the new version, she was joined by Carter's low-growl arco bass and a solo by Malone.

"Akua has catchy melodies that stick in your head," Malone said over the phone. "The tunes we played on are soulful and harmonically interesting. It was great that she was able to get Ron and Victor because while they bring their own personalities to the music, they don't

get in the way or overshadow her vision."

Also included on *Akua's Dance* are two compositions—the upbeat title track and the grooved "I Dream A Dream"—that are a part of an opera Dixon is composing titled *The Opera Of Marie Laveau*, about the 19th-century voodoo queen from New Orleans. "I'm finished orchestrating the first half and now I've got to complete the second half," she said.

She'll also be working on new pieces about healing, agitations and civil rights. "Music is something we all have to have, but it has to be fresh—not part of a routine and packaged in a box," she said. "I'm just going to write and play in my house and keep creatively fresh." **DB**



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## Carmen Lundy

### *Code Noir*

AFRASIA PRODUCTIONS

★★★★½

Director Elia Kazan once said that you can't make a great film with a weak script. The same goes for CDs. Carmen Lundy is a wonderful singer and musician, and the 12 songs she wrote for *Code Noir* showcase her talents effectively.

But Sinatra's *In The Wee Small Hours*—another specimen of the art of the noir album—it isn't. This is because for a singer, the songs are the shooting script of a CD. And the screenplay could be stronger here.

Lundy the vocalist lavishes great care on this material, with particular attention to the darker, prowling colorations and ambiance that her voice is well equipped to provide.

As a performer, her range, instrumental chops and overall craft give her many choices. They come together in a silky cocktail of jazz singing with prominent pop and smooth-jazz overtones, in which Lundy serves as her own backup singers.

As to Lundy the songwriter, I'm uneasy passing summary judgements on new songs. It's a subjective call, and anyway, the better ones don't always reveal their real powers on a first date. They need time.

This is particularly true of jazz material. "Lush Life" and "Round Midnight" took decades to incubate and infiltrate the Great American Songbook. All I can say now about the 12 original pieces here is that they "work" within the basic rigors of the songwriting craft.

But if the rhyme schemes balance properly, the ideas seem thin and stretched. The notion of living "out loud" and "Kumbaya" are something of clichés at this point, and the narrative of "I Got Your Number" is essentially a flirtatious negotiation over sex—coy, but not especially clever, though Lundy's subtle but concentrated vibrato gives the song considerable musical life.

The arrangements and accompaniment are appropriate, sophisticated and thoughtful. On "Afterglow" Lundy shares a nicely honed scat interlude with guitarist Jeff Parker.

But the takeaway from the tunes them-



Carmen Lundy

selves is limited. "I Keep Falling" is among the better ones. The melody sways back and forth in a descending drift (think Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz") that fits the emotional narrative of a breakup. But the procession of images doesn't really gel into a story.

This leaves Lundy the singer in a stronger place than Lundy the songwriter. Best that she

play to her strengths on the former.

—John McDonough

**Code Noir:** Another Chance; Live Out Loud; Black And Blues; Whatever It Takes; Afterglow; Second Sight; The Island, The Sea And You; I Keep Falling; I Got Your Number; You Came Into My Life; Have A Little Faith; Kumbaya. (47:06)

**Personnel:** Carmen Lundy, vocals, keyboards, guitar; Jeff Parker, electric guitar; Patrice Rushen, piano; Ben Williams, bass; Kendrick Scott, drums; Elisabeth Oei, background vocals.

**Ordering info:** [afrasia productions.com](http://afrasia productions.com)



## Joey DeFrancesco and the People *Project Freedom*

MACK AVENUE 1121

★★★★½

In a timely and nicely varied program, Joey DeFrancesco and his quartet pay homage to peaceful protest and social activism. It's a soulful sequence of songs, allowing for the leader to get a few squirts of groove juice, as well as some other feels, and it may convince listeners to consider questions of freedom—in jazz, in society, in personal action—or just induce them to sit back and enjoy the ride.

## Jeremy Pelt *Make Noise!*

HIGH NOTE 7299

★★★★½

I love finesse, but I'm pretty sure it's the push-and-shove of jazz—the music's combusive vigor—that hooked me early on. That explains why I've been down with Jeremy Pelt's stuff for a while now. In the large, the New York-based trumpeter leads bands that put physicality up front. He turned 40 last November, but his music's intrepid nature remains super obvious. Even when it's taking time out for a tender sigh, *Make Noise!* is a testament to improvisation's hard-hitting persona.

A new quintet helps the trumpeter execute his plans. Drummer Jonathan Barber has a way with splash and pianist Victor Gould stresses the percussive aspects of his instrument. The title cut is a storm, but not in a monolithic way; there are plenty of nuances in the hubbub, and swag surely marks the path. It's born of blunt authority—listen to the clout Barber chooses to build on—but rides a string of sophisticated maneuvers. Even when the band is floating at medium tempo, as on “Prince” and “Cry Freedom,” there's a layer of vehemence at work.

Ballads don't deter Pelt from this path, either. “Digression” is peaceful, and the trum-

Fortunately, only a snippet of John Lennon's “Imagine” is needed to suggest the whole song, so they don't linger there. With saxophonist Troy Roberts plying wonderfully fulsome tenor, “Better Than Yesterday” has a light touch, waltzing along with some deceptively tricky little breaks. DeFrancesco is downright sentimental on the ballad “Peace Bridge,” another original that sounds like it's from an earlier era. On the more contemporary tip, “The Unifier” has a neat melodic twist and indeed unites unlike elements, ending with a brightening of the rhythm that encourages guitarist Dan Wilson to shine.

The couple of non-originals are winners: Tony Crombie and Benny Green's “So Near, So Far,” which starts out as funk and then flips into modern organ mode with Jason Brown providing breezy swing; a solemn take on “Lift Every Voice And Sing”; and a stirring version of Sam Cooke's “A Change Is Gonna Come.” Though there's plenty of diversity, to DeFrancesco's credit he's held back from going too many directions at once; the trumpet changeup “One” is perhaps the least interesting track.

—John Corbett

**Project Freedom:** Imagine (Prelude); Project Freedom; The Unifier; Better Than Yesterday; Lift Every Voice And Sing; One; So Near, So Far; Peace Bridge; Karma; A Change Is Gonna Come; Stand Up. (64:21)

**Personnel:** Joey DeFrancesco, organ, keyboards, trumpet; Troy Roberts, tenor soprano saxophone; Dan Wilson, guitar; Jason Brown, drums.

**Ordering info:** [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)



peter's horn boasts an eerie sense of romance. But it's designed on a repeating pulse, and its tender façade has a feisty bottom. When the boss mutes his horn and walks on the sunny side of the street, there's another shift in temperament. This mélange of moods imbues *Make Noise!* with intrigue. It's catholic in its emotions, but that commitment to volition is always its ace in the hole.

—Jim Macnie

**Make Noise!** Prologue—Introduction To Make Noise!; Make Noise; Prince; Cry Freedom; Digression; Introduction To Evolution; Evolution; Chateau D'Eau; Your First Touch; Bodega Social. (52:53)

**Personnel:** Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Victor Gould, piano; Vincente Archer, bass; Jonathan Barber, drums; Jacqueline Acevedo, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [jazzdepot.com](http://jazzdepot.com)



## Heads of State *Four In One*

SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS 1702

★★★

*Four In One*, the second album by the esteemed quartet of elders that constitute Heads of State—this iteration featuring Gary Bartz (saxophones), Larry Willis (piano), David Williams (bass) and Al Foster (drums)—is a bit of a disappointment after the band's robust 2015 debut, *Search For Peace*.

Though the band's soulful mainstream mission and smartly chosen repertoire are solidly intact, the mood of the new album feels more oblique, even off-hand at times.

David Williams replaces Buster Williams, who soloed far more on *Search For Peace* and felt like more of a contributing presence. Bartz's sour intonation, which in judicious servings can provide stylistic color, here gets downright annoying.

That said, with musicians this seasoned, there's plenty to admire and enjoy. The saxophonist sparkles on “Milestones”—the harmonically darting tune John Lewis wrote for Bird and Miles in 1947, not the modal one by Davis—and also takes a couple of speedy trips through bebopville on Parker's zig-zagging romp “Moose The Mooche” and Davis' “Sippin' At Bells.”

The new album also includes an original by each band member, and the best is Willis' poignant, harmonically descending ballad “The Day You Said Goodbye,” with the pianist offering a warm, lush solo.

But the best comes last, when the band applies a joyous New Orleans street beat to the Eddie Harris classic “Freedom Jazz Dance,” with Williams and Foster jockeying through the rhythm and Bartz supplying a crisp soprano shout.

—Paul de Barros

**Four In One:** Four In One; And He Called Himself A Messenger; Dance Cadaverous; Moose The Mooche; Aloysius; The Day You Said Goodbye; Milestones; Keep The Master In Mind; Someone To Watch Over Me; Sippin' At Bells; Freedom Jazz Dance. (72:14)

**Personnel:** Gary Bartz, tenor and soprano saxophone (3, 11); Larry Willis, piano; David Williams, bass; Al Foster, drums.

**Ordering info:** [smokesessionsrecords.com](http://smokesessionsrecords.com)



# The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
<b>Carmen Lundy</b> <i>Code Noir</i>	★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★
<b>Joey DeFrancesco and the People</b> <i>Project Freedom</i>	★★★½	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★
<b>Jeremy Pelt</b> <i>Make Noise!</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★½
<b>Heads of State</b> <i>Four In One</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Carmen Lundy, *Code Noir*

Lots to dig about Lundy's unique approach. Unusual atmosphere to these topical, political and romantic songs, which are slickly produced, super shiny sounding, but also have tactility and frame her wonderful voice.  
—John Corbett

When the songs don't captivate—and this particular mix is hit-or-miss—her voice swoops down and provides a focal point. It's sensuality, it's wisdom, it's curiosity—they all roll up into a fetching package.  
—Jim Macnie

Lundy's ruggedly conversational lyrics and welcome social commentary inhabit territory Abbey Lincoln and Marvin Gaye both might recognize, but the atmospheric '70s bedroom vibe feels dated, and Lundy's wonderfully husky alto often feels disconnected.  
—Paul de Barros

### Joey DeFrancesco and the People, *Project Freedom*

A fairly typical DeFrancesco set that delivers everything the B-3 was built for. The new twist is saw-toothed tenor Troy Roberts. Once the title track springs to life, he bursts into a boppish flight that recalls Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis.  
—John McDonough

The focus is on a group sound, and Troy Roberts' horn has a prominent role. But the boss ultimately defines this outing, almost by default. His instrument's personality is wildly compelling.  
—Jim Macnie

Applying his finger-popping chops on organ and Fender Rhodes and pungent trumpet to timely themes of social justice, DeFrancesco digs into the zeitgeist, raising rippling waves of joy and hope in dark times.  
—Paul de Barros

### Jeremy Pelt, *Make Noise!*

Pelt is a virtuoso of trumpet timbre, not unique but quite masterful. Tough he can snarl and rip when occasion demands, mostly the notes tumble out in a clean, orderly flow with a woody warmth and minimal vibrato.  
—John McDonough

Another strong outing from the trumpeter, generally very '70s in feel, but with his own contemporary sensibility. Nice to have the thickened percussion.  
—John Corbett

The bass-piano call-and-answer on the suspenseful "Digression," faraway sweetness of Pelt's muted trumpet on "Chateau d'Eau" and energetic solo on "Bodega Special" all provide some life to an album that, overall, feels pretty listless.  
—Paul de Barros

### Heads of State, *Four In One*

Deep into a "post-bop" age now, some may wonder, "What was bop?" Here's an answer. New-comers in the mid-'60s, Bartz and company were a generation removed but cut from its matrix. Returning to their roots here, it's easy to see where their home is.  
—John McDonough

This is a supergroup worth hearing, not just names or egos, but a real congregation of great musical spirits. Love how much air Al Foster leaves in his playing, which is so precise.  
—John Corbett

Like Sphere before them, this aggregate brings lifetimes of bop expertise to the table. It works—but I can't help thinking that their connection could be a bit firmer. There are moments when each seems to be on his own.  
—Jim Macnie

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## José James *Love In A Time Of Madness*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★★

On his last album, the 5-star-rated *Yesterday I Had The Blues: The Music Of Billie Holiday*, singer José James appeared on the cover in dapper early '60s chic and performed with an all-star jazz trio. For *Love In A Time Of Madness*, James has grown out his hair, shed his shirt to flash his tattoos and pecs, and beefed up his studio crew to 17, with layers of synths, drum machines and keyboards. In place of Holiday's literate tales of love gone wrong, he's dropping

F-bombs and singing about how much coke he consumed the night before.

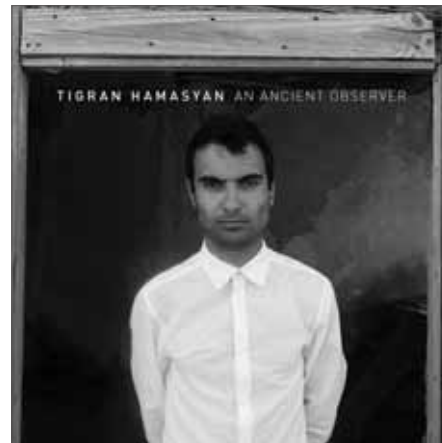
Don't ever let it be said that James is afraid to mess with a winning formula. Shucking a lean jazz style for a slick r&b approach usually smacks of cashing in with a commercial product, but James seems more like he's coming at his fans from left field, hoping he can convince them he's as bad as he is good. *Love In A Time Of Madness* references contemporary influences like Drake, Kanye West and Bryson Tiller, but also reflects the Minneapolis music scene of James' youth.

While the opening tracks are filled with cut beats and whirring digital effects, "Let It Fall," features a simple, moody guitar, hand drum and multiple voices in its first verses, revealing a definitive jazz background. Don't think he's crossed over to hip-hop for keeps. —*James Hale*

**Love In A Time Of Madness:** Always There; What Good Is Love; Let It Fall; Last Night; Remember Our Love; Live Your Fantasy; Ladies Man; To Be With You; You Know I Know; Breakthrough; Closer; I'm Yours. (45:49)

**Personnel:** José James, Zach Wilson (1, 2), Gisella Hilliman (6), Oleta Adams (12), vocals; Antario Holmes, vocals (1, 11), programming (8, 11), drum programming (1–4, 6, 7, 11), keyboards (1–4, 7, 11), synthesizer (1–4, 6, 7, 11, 12), piano (12), guitar (3); Jesse Singer, vocals (9), bass (5, 9, 10), drum programming (5, 9, 10), keyboards (9, 10), synthesizer (5, 9); Mali Music, vocals (3), piano (8), electric piano (8), drums (8), percussion (8); Solomon Dorsey, vocals (3), bass (6, 7); Philip Lassiter, Brandyn Phillips, trumpet (7); Chris Johnson, trombone (7); Danny Janklow, tenor saxophone (7); Paul Cerra, baritone saxophone (7); Scott Jacoby, keyboards (6), synthesizer (6); Chris Soper, guitar (5, 9, 10), organ (5), synthesizer (5, 9, 10), drum programming (9, 10); Ian Bakerman (6), Chris Bruce (7), guitar; Nathaniel Smith, drums (7).

Ordering info: [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com)



## Tigran Hamasyan *An Ancient Observer*

NONESUCH 559114

★★★★½

There's no such thing as the "same old, same old" with Tigran Hamasyan.

The Armenian-American pianist's last few albums have found him improvising atmospheric jazz in a quartet with trumpet, guitar and sampler; arranging Armenian sacred songs for piano and chorus; and playing with what he described as "an electro-acoustic Armenian rock trio."

*An Ancient Observer*, in typical contrast, is mostly solo piano, leavened with occasional vocals and electronics, and consisting both of through-composed and partially improvised pieces. Like nearly all of his work, it's simply breathtaking.

Subtlety is key. Hamasyan puts so much emphasis on mood and melody that it's easy to miss how well structured the compositions are, how virtuosic the playing is. Some of this has to do with way the non-piano aspects of the recording are layered in.

"The Cave Of Rebirth," for example, opens with Hamasyan singing distantly in falsetto along with the piano line. But when the piece shifts to the "B" section, Hamasyan's vocals move to the fore in multitracked harmony, a trick that underscores the harmonic movement of his arpeggiated piano without undercutting its rhythmic urgency.

At its best, the music recalls the way Ryuichi Sakamoto's piano pieces seemed to claim a space of their own between classical and pop, marrying the dignity of the former to the charm of the latter.

It's a neat trick, and doubtless something Hamasyan will abandon on his next album.

—*J.D. Considine*

## Cameron Graves *Planetary Prince*

MACK AVENUE 112316

★★★★½

In 2015, Kamasi Washington, the powerful saxophonist who brought the West Coast Get Down to critical attention, unleashed *The Epic*, a daring three-CD set that, like this album, busts genres. Now Washington's main keyboard man, the virtuosic Cameron Graves, unleashes *Planetary Prince*, an ambitious foray into the mystical and the extraterrestrial.

The album title derives from *The Urantia Book*, a 1955 publication about the "master universe" that builds on the "world's religious heritage," according to the Chicago-based Urantia Foundation. *Planetary Prince* expands on a four-track EP Graves released in 2016.

This long album stars Graves' rolling, florid piano even as it showcases *Epic* stalwarts Washington, trombonist Ryan Porter and brothers Ronald Bruner Jr. and Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner, respectively, on drums and bass. Trumpeter Philip Dizack, trombonist Ryan Porter and bassist Hadrien Feraud also provide bite and body.

Graves is a master, laying intricate melodic lines over driving drums and cymbal chokes. "Satania Our Solar System," the opener, is devilish, like "El Diablo," a distant relative of



"Caravan," Juan Tizol's signature piece for Duke Ellington. The music continues through permutations to form a suite rich in repeated yet varied motifs. A war between good and evil is at the heart of this otherworldly and exhilarating recording, and if the production verges on the overblown at times, the excess is far more glorious than wretched. —*Carlo Wolff*

**Planetary Prince:** Satanian Our Solar System; Planetary Prince; El Diablo; Adam & Eve; End Of Corporatism; Andromeda; Isle Of Love; The Lucifer Rebellion. (78:20)

**Personnel:** Cameron Graves, piano; Philip Dizack, trumpet; Ryan Porter, trombone; Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone; Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner, Hadrien Feraud, bass; Ronald Bruner Jr., drums.

Ordering info: [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)

**An Ancient Observer:** Markos And Markos; The Cave Of Rebirth; New Baroque 1; Nairian Odyssey; New Baroque 2; Étude No. 1; Egyptian Poet; Fides Tua; Leninagone; Ancient Observer. (44:55)

**Personnel:** Tigran Hamasyan, piano, voices, synthesizers, Fender Rhodes, effects.

Ordering info: [nonesuch.com](http://nonesuch.com)



## Gary Smulyan *Royalty At Le Duc*

GROOVIN' HIGH 4751

★★★★½

It's not hard to understand why baritone saxophonist Gary Smulyan is such a consistent poll winner. He's got a great sound, incredible facility, and is an improviser of exceptional wit and insight. What's hard to grasp about the guy is why he's made so few albums. In the 27 years since he made his debut as a leader, Smulyan's catalogue has grown to a mere dozen records, many of them tributes or otherwise themed. It's far fewer than his talent would merit.

In that sense, *Royalty At Le Duc* is both a delight and a frustration. Recorded with a pick-up rhythm section in a single night at a Paris jazz club, it captures Smulyan at his most natural, unencumbered by album concepts or complicated arrangements. For straightahead, bop-inspired baritone blowing, you'd be hard-pressed to do better than the dozen-plus acrobatic choruses he takes on the Thad Jones chestnut "Thedia." He shines even brighter on the ballads, conjuring melodic twists in the lyrical line he concocts for Billy Strayhorn's "The Star-Crossed Lovers."

There's a nice moment in "Body And Soul" where pianist Olivier Hutman's substitute chords coax the saxophonist into a sly quote of John Coltrane's "Countdown," but such flashes of improvisational serendipity are rarer than they should be.

—J.D. Considine

**Royalty At Le Duc:** Thedia; The Star-Crossed Lovers; Cindy's Tune; Serenity; Elusive; Laura; Body And Soul. (77:35)

**Personnel:** Gary Smulyan, baritone saxophone; Olivier Hutman, piano; Michel Rosciglione, bass; Bernd Reiter, drums

**Ordering info:** [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)



## Yotam Silberstein *The Village*

JAZZ&PEOPLE

★★★★½

The first notes from guitarist Yotam Silberstein and the first of his eight compositions are so excitingly different that they almost certainly will grab most listeners and hold them for the album's hour-long duration.

Silberstein is a member of the wave of Israeli musicians who in the past decade have come to the United States and enjoyed success and acclaim. With *The Village*, we have the pleasure to hear a marvelous, distinctive guitarist who settled in New York in 2005. Silberstein honed his skills playing and studying with a number of major American players in his homeland and in New York, and that experience has helped him make informed choices in sidemen, which here include pianist Aaron Goldberg, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Greg Hutchinson.

The band's rapport is impressive. Everything the musicians play sounds right: Goldberg soloing, comping, playing in unison with Silberstein; Rogers offering accompaniment and brief, clear breaks; Hutchinson providing power and subtlety. The music is an intriguing combination of folk, modern jazz and solemn, moving classical. But Silberstein chose a surprise ending for his album, Lennie Tristano's happy "Lennie Bird."

—Bob Protzman



**The Village:** Parabens; Milonga Girls; Nocturno; The Village; Stav; Fuzz; Albayzin; Changes; O Voo Da Mosca; October; Lennie Bird. (64:45)

**Personnel:** Yotam Silberstein, guitar; Aaron Goldberg, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums.

**Ordering info:** [jazzandpeople.com](http://jazzandpeople.com)

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## Eskelin/Weber/ Griener *Sensations Of Tone*

INTAKT 276

★★★★

The name of this album derives from a 19th-century text on acoustics, but it also puts one of Ellery Eskelin's virtues on the table from the outset. The sound he gets out of his tenor saxophone is luxurious but versatile, making equal sense waxing voluptuous in old ballads, darting across the broken ground of free improvisation or connecting the dots between the two. The two Swiss musicians who join him in this trio are similarly gifted. Like Eskelin, bassist Christian Weber celebrates the essential sound of his instrument. He eschews amplification, and every note invites you to savor the vibration of wood. And Michael Griener makes each stroke upon his drum kit stand out in relief while making sense as part of an immaculately executed expression of sound in motion.

The three men use their shared sensibilities to establish commonality between two varieties of material. Half of the performances are improvisations, free in execution but derived from hours of private practice that have established group values of formal elegance, sonic clarity and affective power. On "Dumbo," for example, adroit reed figures, complex bowed tonalities and lightly drizzling percussion evoke an eerie atmosphere, but there's real solidity behind the mist.

—Bill Meyer

**Sensations Of Tone:** Orchard And Broom; Shreveport Stomp; Cornelia Street; China Boy; Dittmas Avenue; Moten Swing; Dumbo; Ain't Misbehavin'. (52:56)

**Personnel:** Ellery Eskelin, tenor saxophone; Christian Weber, bass; Michael Griener, drums.

Ordering info: [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)



## Chano Dominguez *Over The Rainbow*

SUNNYSIDE 1472

★★★★

Most of *Over The Rainbow* was recorded live in Spain, the pianist's home country. This may account in part for Chano Dominguez's inspired performance: It was the right time and place to let his jazz, flamenco and folk spirits soar.

On most of these tracks, Dominguez takes roughly the same approach. He begins with moody ruminations on the material, most often in free tempo marked by a sense of rushing toward the peaks of key phrases, stopping for a moment as if to savor the view and then stepping or tumbling along with the melody's descent.

For example, he opens "Django" in a halting meter, transitions to more jagged rustlings as a nod to the bracing guitar strums of flamenco, and ends up with pointed jabs spaced around the stop-start concepts that often define his left-hand part. The effect is to state and then expand beyond the sway of the composition, thus honoring both John Lewis' vision and the room he'd left for interpreters to explore. Cuban and Spanish influences add further dimension to *Over The Rainbow*, allowing joy and sorrow to speak together. Only the title track narrows this focus, but here Dominguez achieves a cerebral, disciplined passion that only Keith Jarrett and few others have discovered.

—Bob Doerschuk



**Over The Rainbow:** Django; Drume Negrita; Evidence; Gracias A La Vida; Hacia Dónde; Los Ejes De Mi Carreta; Manterria; Marcel; Monk's Dream; Over The Rainbow. (68:31)

**Personnel:** Chano Dominguez, piano.

Ordering info: [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)

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## Mightier Than the Sword

A host of distinctive, fresh jazz composers are on the scene today, equally adept with the pen as they are with the ax. Here's a sampling of what to listen for, ranging from the semi-traditional (emphasis on the "semi") to the decidedly unorthodox.

**Bert Joris & the Brussels Jazz Orchestra, *Smooth Shake* (De Werf 144; 67:36 ★★★★★)** This rollicking CD may at times evoke Gil Evans, at others Benny Golson. But trumpeter-composer Joris and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra offer their own kind of cool, spanning both versions of the funky title track, the rich ballad "How Could We Forget" and "Nasty Boy," stand-outs among these nine captivating tunes. "Nasty Boy" is a witty portrait of a snazzy dude that sets Joris' tart lines and squeals against fat trombones to forge a way-cool piece of Euro soul; Toni Vitacolonna's drumming also abounds with flourish and drama. In a similarly engaging vein: "Mr. Dado," a showcase for alto saxophonist Frank Vaganée, Hendrik Braeckman's guitar and Marc Godfroid's trombone.

Ordering info: [brusselsjazzorchestra.com](http://brusselsjazzorchestra.com)

**Bill Anschell, *Rumbler* (Origin 82728; 66:00 ★★★★★)** Ambivalence and shadowplay suffuse this intriguing album by Portland, Oregon-based piano guru Anschell. Jeff Coffin's querulous soprano saxophone launches the medium-tempo title track, one of the most conversational on this engaging CD. The soloists vary, but the qualities of surprise and confidence always figure here. In addition to originals spanning the piquant "Heisenberg's Fugue State" and "39F," a tricky exercise verging on pop, Anschell delivers a liberated interpretation of Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso," a "For No One" that shows how wonderfully malleable Beatles melodies can be, and a magisterial solo rendition of Duke Ellington's "Reflections In D."

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

**The Delegation, *Evergreen (Canceled World)* (ESP-Disk 5017; 84:48 ★★★★★½)** Pianist-composer **Gabriel Zuckerman** leads a definitively diverse ensemble through an ecologically resonant program of 12 movements. The result is a fascinating form of sonic installation blending wild improvisation, classical strings, disciplined unison passages and untrammelled solo excursions. The titles of the tunes are largely cryptic, the movements not easy to sync with. These notes on "Headlight Imprecise (Summaries 1)," one of the longer tracks, may communicate this startling album's unique atmosphere: cacophonous and anarchic, collapsing into piano, very urban as in traffic jam and road rage, then collapsing (or is it coalescing?) into string sweep, yet still packing that piano punch. Then the saxes thicken the mix, beginning to hint at a direction, a form emerging out of chaos. The struggle is exciting, if not easy. Midway through, it softens, as if not sure where to go, but slowly, saxophone and violins assert themselves.

Ordering info: [espdisk.com](http://espdisk.com)

**Josh Green & The Cyborg Orchestra, *Telepathy & Bop* (Self Release; 67:52 ★★★★★)** If Looney Tunes were to revive, Green would write the soundtracks. This long, animated album encompasses stentorian modern jazz in "Improvisation & Nebula," a track that proves Green a piano master; the smoky, eerie "La Victoire"; the sinuous dance tune "Reverie Engine: The Ambiguous Rhumba"; and the sparkling "Soir Bleu." The album is a marvel of unexpected voicings, as well as tunes that threaten to go every which way but are paradoxically even-keeled. It also features the cacophonous "Boy & Dog In A Johnny-pump" and "The Lauer Transplant," the aural document of Green's unexpected meeting with a certain television personality. **DB**

Ordering info: [joshuagreenmusic.com](http://joshuagreenmusic.com)



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## Robert Randolph & The Family Band *Got Soul*

SONY MASTERWORKS B01N1NDX7K

★★★★

Pedal steel guitar player Robert Randolph grew up playing Sacred Steel, an African-American style of music that came out of the Pentecostal church in the 1930s. Sacred Steel makes use of slurred notes, piano-like chords and phrasing that suggests the vocals of gospel singers, sounding far away from the familiar tones of country music.

Randolph never listened to secular music until his early 20s, when he played with John

Medeski and the Mississippi Allstars in The Word, an all-instrumental gospel jam band. After that, Randolph put together The Family Band and introduced the sounds of Sacred Steel to the secular world.

The sounds Randolph gets out of his instrument are astonishing—chiming chord clusters, barks and growls, subterranean bass notes and shrieking, heavy metal-style sustained leads. The Family Band is just as impressive, especially electric guitarist Johnny Gale, who often joins Randolph for extended harmonic excursions.

“Love Do What It Do,” with a vocal by guest Darius Rucker (Hootie & the Blowfish), and “Find A Way” combine the most uplifting aspects of church music with a sound that owes more than a little to Sly and the Family Stone. Randolph introduces the band’s cover of Sam & Dave’s “I Thank You,” with a solo that demonstrates the subtle vocal nuances he can produce on the pedal steel.

—j. poet

**Got Soul:** Got Soul; She Got Soul; Love Do What It Do; Shake It; I Thank You; Be The Change; Heaven’s Calling; Find A Way; I Want It; Travelin’ Cheeba Man; Lovesick; Gonna Be Alright. (44:59)

**Personnel:** Robert Randolph, pedal steel guitar, lap steel guitar, vocals; Johnny Gale, electric guitar; Eric Gales, electric guitar; Raymond Angry, Hammond B-3, Wurliitzer electric piano; Shendrick Mitchell, Joey Williams, vocals, Hammond B-3, Wurliitzer electric piano; Derrick Hodge, bass; Marcus Randolph, drums; Bashiri Johnson, percussion; Jeff Coffin, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone; RaShawn Ross, trumpet; Cory Henry, Hammond B-3, vocals; Armand Hutton, vocal; Anthony Hamilton, vocals; Darius Rucker, vocals; Leneshia Randolph, Candice Anderson, Stevie Ladson, Johnny Gale, vocals, background vocals.

**Ordering info:** [sonymasterworks.com](http://sonymasterworks.com)



## Mostly Other People *Do the Killing* *Loafer's Hollow*

HOT CUP

★★★½

The quartet Mostly Other People Do the Killing has received both flak and respect for its inquisitive, sometimes comedic, attitude toward jazz history. The virtuosic front line of founding trumpeter Peter Evans and saxophonist Jon Irabagon lent gravitas to bassist Moppa Elliott’s compositions, which investigated the merits and demerits of various jazz sub-genres and needled at the music’s tension between future orientation and historical preoccupation.

*Loafer’s Hollow* finds the band, now augmented to a septet, revisiting its own history. Like *Red Hot*, MOPDtK’s 2013 release, it combines hot jazz with contemporary extended techniques, cracking wise in the process.

The playing throughout is delightful. Stephen Bernstein delivers a dizzying unaccompanied slide trumpet solo that is much more than a sop to Evans fans, and on “Kilgore” Stabinsky gives a wild performance that spikes silent-movie anxiety with free-jazz explosions.

Taken a track at a time, this album is excellent. It’s only when you consider it as a whole that a problem emerges. You won’t find *Loafer’s Hollow* on a map these days; the location’s name has been changed to Library and, more recently, South Park Township. This gives the group an excuse to dedicate six out of eight tunes to authors, but to what end? There’s nothing in the good-natured blues “Meridian,” for example, that brings to mind Cormac McCarthy’s disturbing story. Measured against MOPDtK’s past accomplishments, one wishes for more conceptual coherence.

—Bill Meyer

**Loafer’s Hollow:** *Loafer’s Hollow*: Hi-Nella; Honey Hole; Bloomsburg (For James Joyce); Kilgore (For Kurt Vonnegut); Mason And Dixon (For Thomas Pynchon); Meridian (For Cormac McCarthy); Glen Riddle (For David Foster Wallace); Five (Corners, Points, Forks). (40:11)

**Personnel:** Steven Bernstein, trumpet, slide trumpet; Jon Irabagon, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Dave Taylor, bass trombone; Brandon Seabrook, banjo, electronics; Ron Stabinsky, piano; Moppa Elliott, bass; Kevin Shea, drums.

**Ordering info:** [hotcuprecords.com](http://hotcuprecords.com)

## Bobby Previte *Mass*

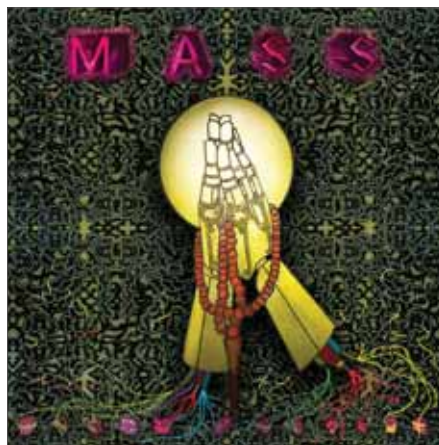
RARENOISE RECORDS

★★★½

Drummer and composer Bobby Previte’s extravagant *Mass* can only be filed under “prog-goth doom-choral” with its heavenly (or hellish) voices caught up in a maelstrom of heavily riffing guitar and churning organs.

The Rose Ensemble provides choral voices throughout. Previte dwells underneath, charged with a thundering responsibility. The current king of overloaded guitars is the Seattle drone-metal band Sunn O)))’s Stephen O’Malley, and Previte has wisely chosen him for this weighty ordeal. Marco Benevento is the chief organist, although Previte himself gets to pipe in occasionally. There’s a combination of organ sounds that veer from reverberant vastness to thinly electric.

Previte’s new work is built upon the foundations of Dufay’s *Missa Sancti Jacobi* (probably composed in either 1427 or ’28), but this might not be immediately apparent. It all sounds like one long piece, although the track demarcations signify different phases in a suite-like progression. The introductory bombast soon settles down for a spell of contemplation, but the full Black Sabbath-style riffing enters forcefully on “Gloria,” alternating



with the choral voices. A halo of calmness ascends, and then gets driven away by dirty headbanging.

This is largely an ensemble work, with varying elements creeping forward during its course. Previte has successfully married all of these seemingly incompatible elements inside a church of holy and unholy noise-sculpture.

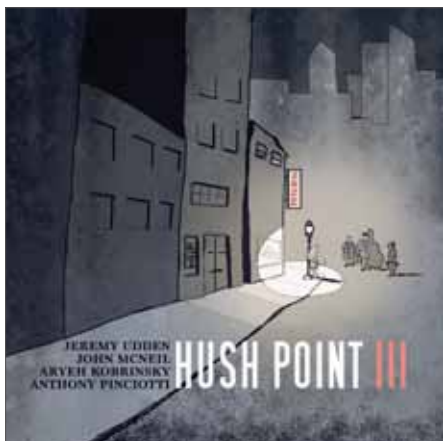
—Martin Longley

**Mass:** Introit; Kyrie; Gloria; Alleluia; Credo; Offering; Sanctus; Agnus Dei; Communion. (69:31)

**Personnel:** Bobby Previte, drums, guitar, organ, synthesizer; bass; Reed Mathis, electric bass; Marco Benevento, organ; Stephen O’Malley, Jamie Saft, Mike Gamble, Don McGreevy, guitars; The Rose Ensemble, vocals.

**Ordering info:** [rarenoise.com](http://rarenoise.com)





## Hush Point III

SUNNYSIDE 1457

★★★★½

The first pair of tunes on this third Hush Point album adopt a retro-bebop stance, but a closer listen reveals the slightly subversive nature of these original compositions, coming mostly from the pen of trumpeter John McNeil.

The majority of the tracks are limited to rock or pop music durations, densely populated with meaningful development. The crisply entangled themes spill over into the solos by McNeil and saxophonist Jeremy Udden, as each player continues to embellish underneath the other's soloing activities. McNeil heads off into a peppery passage, with Udden moving breathily underneath, himself rising up to send out solo creepers. Unusually, Udden brandishes a straight alto and a C-melody variant.

The dominant Hush Point horn partner is changeable, but always working around a compatible equality. On "Wilbur," the bass might be walking continually, but the trumpet and saxophone solos are shifty in their role-playing. Udden's playing has a mellow cushioning, an attractively honeyed tone that's rounder and warmer than that aspired to by the majority of competitive saxophonists nowadays.

"Cautiously Pessimistic" begins a three-part suite, with drumming that sounds like foot-stomping, bass bowed sonorously. McNeil's lone trumpet bridges each section, and the suite soon slows to a treacle progress, Udden comforting softly. Anthony Pinciotti hovers brushes across skins and hi-hat, and his drum kit is a key factor in this New York combo's literally "hush point" approach. All is soft and tender, but this doesn't inhibit their subtle bite and sociable punch.

—Martin Longley

**Hush Point:** Rhythm Method; Wilbur; It's A Pocketbook; Azmari Bar; PG-13; Suite: Cautiously Pessimistic, More Than You Know, Snappy; Journey's End. (39:56)

**Hush Point III:** John McNeil, trumpet; Jeremy Udden, alto saxophone, C-melody saxophone; Anyeh Kobrinsky, bass; Anthony Pinciotti, drums.

Ordering info: [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)

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## John Raymond & Real Feels

### Live Vol. 1

SHIFTING PARADIGM 121

★★★★½

Trumpeter John Raymond launched his Real Feels project in order to allow nostalgia and familiarity to fuel the improvisational spirit of jazz, tapping into melodies that resonate in the musician's Midwestern roots. The repertoire on this trio's debut studio album mixed folk song and spiritual favorites along with a couple of original tunes and rock gems of more recent vintage, but the group's first live recording lets us hear what the Minneapolis native was shooting for. The cohesion developed with his limber band—guitarist Gilad Hekselman and drummer Colin Stranahan—is palpable.

The gospel standard "I'll Fly Away," for example, is given a rollicking second-line shuffle groove by Stranahan, while Hekselman deftly adapts the Americana-tinged attack of Bill Frisell. Stranahan gets plenty of room to act on a treatment of Thom Yorke's "Atoms For Peace," during which he's constantly displacing beats, chopping up patterns and firing off electric accents, serving up a delicious tension with the calmer, lyric playing of his bandmates, although as the tune wends towards its conclusion the heat rises across the board. The trio beautifully reconfigures "Amazing Grace" into a ballad that sounds like it belongs in the Great American Songbook rather than a hymnal.

—Peter Margasak

**Live Vol. 1:** I'll Fly Away; Yesterday; Atoms For Peace; Amazing Grace; This Land Is Your Land; Minor Silverstein. (65:00)

**Personnel:** John Raymond, trumpet; Gilad Hekselman, guitar; Colin Stranahan, drums.

**Ordering info:** [shiftingparadigmrecords.com](http://shiftingparadigmrecords.com)



## Ben Rosenblum Instead

ONE TRICK DOG

★★★★

A question comes to mind just seconds into the first cut on Ben Rosenblum's debut album: Which came first, the music or the title for "Because It's Raining"? The music is thoughtful, quiet, a little gray. Rosenblum lets it speak with minimal elaboration as Billy Hart underscores its suggestion of a misty drizzle with soft cymbal splashes and pitter-pat fills.

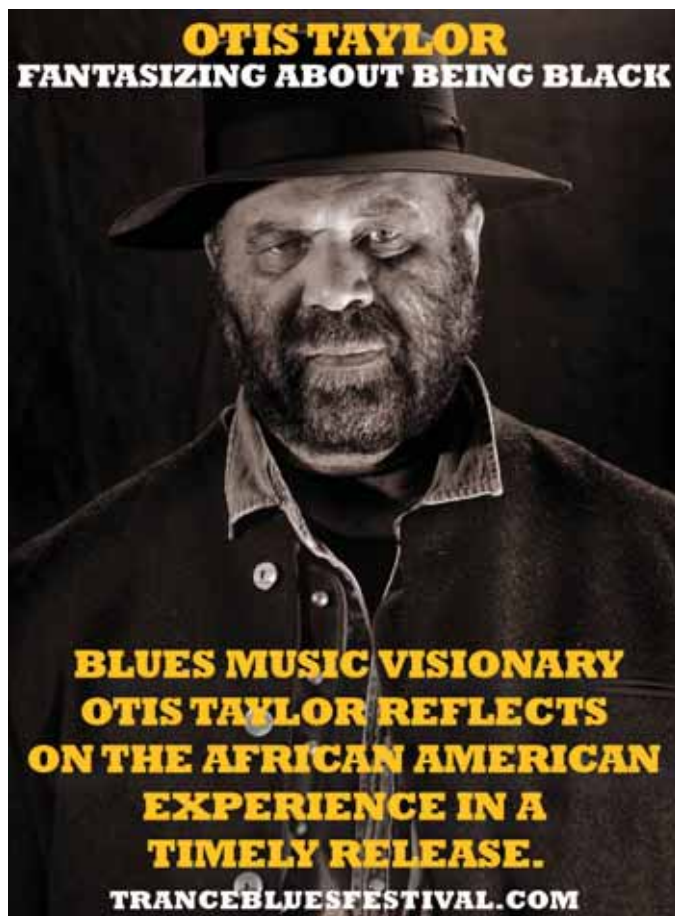
Rosenblum includes several covers here, but on these he leans toward the spirit of the writers. For Sonny Clark's "Nica" he takes an aggressive approach, attacking the first verse with thick two-handed voicings, emphasizing dissonances and open intervals. Rosenblum actually unleashes even greater force on one of his originals, "Blur." It explodes right at the top, with Hart smashing freely and furiously as the piano spells out the theme. On other tunes, though, Rosenblum plays with restraint. The ballad "And Then It's Gone" expands on the structure's harmonic implication, with no quick runs intruding on the picture. He has the chops to shoot off a few fireworks, too, as we hear briefly in his rendering of "Saucer Eyes." But that doesn't seem to be a priority when covering sacred material—Rosenblum and Lundy caress Duke Ellington's "Single Petal Of A Rose" with the reverence it merits.

—Bob Doerschuk

**Instead:** Because It's Raining; Clarisse And Walter; And Then It's Gone; Saucer Eyes; Nica; First Song; Blur; Far Back; Azucar; Single Petal Of A Rose; When Love Was You And Me. (66:35)

**Personnel:** Ben Rosenblum, piano; Curtis Lundy, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

**Ordering info:** [onetrickdogrecords.com](http://onetrickdogrecords.com)



## Morten Schantz Godspeed

EDITION 1081

★★★★½

Few bands in jazz history have so perfected that magic blend between synthesized and acoustic textures as Weather Report, and Danish keyboard dynamo Morten Schantz often veers toward that source as inspiration without apology on his strong, electro-acoustic jazz power trio album *Godspeed*.

But more than slavish imitation is afoot here; rather, Schantz proposes a convincing brand of post-fusion invention. He is a dazzling keyboardist (including vivid turns on Rhodes and *actual* piano) who has a bold partner in Marius Neset, the commanding Norwegian-in-Copenhagen saxophonist whose work includes a deft style-checking of Wayne Shorter and Michael Brecker, another electro-acoustic explorer.

*Godspeed* follows a quasi-conceptual sequence, framed by lyrical prelude/postlude tracks, "Silence In The Tempest." If the title track feels a bit rote, we find a tougher thrill in the odd-timing joyride and wicked-rapid solo might of "Escape Velocity." An all-too-brief abstract/improv track, "Airglow," hints at looser sensibilities, segueing into one of the album's prizes, "Ceasefire," the rambling structure of which kneads and reworks a four-note motif. The ghost of Weather Report dances freely here.

—Josef Woodard

**Godspeed:** Silence Of The Tempest, Part I; Escape Velocity; Growing Sense; Martial Arts; Airglow; Ceasefire; Cathedral; Drill; Nuclear Fusion; Dark Matter; Silence Of The Tempest, Part II. (65:00)

**Personnel:** Morten Schantz, keyboards, clapping; Marius Neset, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Anton Eger, drums, percussion, handclaps.

**Ordering info:** [editionrecords.com](http://editionrecords.com)





## Trouble Free

**Elvin Bishop's Big Fun Trio, *Elvin Bishop's Big Fun Trio* (Alligator 4973; 42:58 ★★★★★)**

In the public eye since the 1960s as part of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Elvin Bishop has always been quick to display his Okie country-boy friendliness. That's especially true for this project, a studio project with fellow West Coasters Willy Jordan on vocals and cajon and Bob Welsh on piano and guitar. Bishop's verbal hijinks go down well with his outstanding guitar work on a docket of originals and classics from Sunnyland Slim's Chicago and Fats Domino's New Orleans. Jordan also plays for keeps, especially good with falsetto assertions in soul-bluesman Ted Taylor's "Can't Take No More." Guest Charlie Musselwhite, another Butterfield alumnus, brandishes his harp and trades memories with Bishop on their autobiographical "100 Years Of Blues."

Ordering info: [alligator.com](http://alligator.com)

**Trudy Lynn, *I'll Sing The Blues For You* (Connor Ray 44:25 ★★½)**

No longer hamstrung by the Ichiban label that emphasized commercial blues, Houston's Trudy Lynn delivers on the album title with verve and purpose on her third Connor Ray effort and 12th overall. Side-stepping the trap of theatricality others fall into, she personalizes worthy songs once handled by Big Mama Thornton, Little Esther, Johnny Copeland and others.

Ordering info: [connorraymusic.com](http://connorraymusic.com)

**Sharon Lewis & Texas Fire, *Grown Ass Woman* (Delmark 849; 57:19 ★★)**

Sharon Lewis, originally from Texas, has been singing in Chicago since the 1990s. She's certainly a good entertainer, although her voice isn't commanding in inflection and doesn't always carry its emotional weight uniformly. A direct stylistic scion of Koko Taylor, she splits songwriting duties with guitarist Steve Bramer, sometimes concerned with germane topics like race and womanhood. Texas Fire relies way too much on obvious blues, soul and blues-rock conventions.

Ordering info: [delmark.com](http://delmark.com)

**Dave Keller, *Right Back Atcha* (Tastee-Tone 3043; 50:26 ★★★★★)**

Dave Keller operates on the soul side of blues. The controlled eagerness and urgency of his singing and his skilled guitar playing slots the Vermonter among other exemplars Tad Robinson and Darrell Nulisch. For this second album, Keller has written melodic and excellent songs about his post-divorce emotional recovery and the appeal of new-found romance. Where Keller really shows an unburdened authority in controlling deep emotion is in his choke-hold grip of



Dave Keller

STEFAN HAND

the fantastic assessment of fractured love called "What's It Gonna Take?" Only one cover: Keller's rescuing of Chicago bluesman Willie Clayton's "It's Time You Made Up Your Mind" from obscurity. His working band, at his side for more than 10 years now, and the Mo' Sax Horns are all committed musicians. A special nod goes to Ira Friedman for his control of texture and drama on B-3 organ.

Ordering info: [davekeller.com](http://davekeller.com)

**John Mayall, *Talk About That* (Forty Below 015; 47:30 ★★)**

What's worth talking about is the toughness and durability of a senior whose vocals and harmonica, guitar and keyboard skills appear remarkably untired despite the wear and tear of a career stretching back to the 1950s. Some of Mayall's new songs are standardized—the funk of the title track is woefully old-hat—but overall he and his band, along with reined-in rock guitarist Joe Walsh, get a passing grade.

Ordering info: [fortybelowrecords.com](http://fortybelowrecords.com)

**Kenny Neal, *Bloodline* (Cleopatra 0374; 44:45 ★★★★★)**

Profiting from Tom Hambridge's sure hand as producer, Kenny Neal delivers a Grammy-nominated album that rivals his best album in the Alligator 1980s and '90s, *Hoodoo Moon*. His rich, low-down vocals and prowess on guitar and harmonica, combined with a flair for songwriting, give him mastery of a Louisiana blues type that is honor-bound to his late father Rafal's swampy sounds. "Thank You B. B. King" is a sterling homage. Not incidentally, there's craft in the string, horn and background vocal arrangements.

DB

Ordering info: [cleopatrarrecords.com](http://cleopatrarrecords.com)



### CHANO DOMÍNGUEZ OVER THE RAINBOW

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I performed some of my original songs — two of them dedicated to my younger children, Serena and Marcel — and some of my favorite American and Latin American standards, including those written by Thelonious Monk, John Lewis, Marta Valdés, and Violeta Parra, among others." —Chano Domínguez



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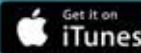
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Recorded at RTI radio studio in Tangier in 1959.



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## Akira Tana and Otonowa *Stars Across The Ocean*

SONS OF SOUND 037

★★★★★

*Stars Across The Ocean* is the second benefit album by Japanese-American veteran drummer Akira Tana's quartet Otonowa for communities struck by 2011's Great Eastern Earthquake and Tsunami.

Ranging from sophisticated, expressive post-bop to heartfelt adaptations of songs of Japanese folk, pop and religious origin, the cohesive band evokes an array of responses to the tragedy—and the album may also be

enjoyed without any reference to its inspiration. Melancholy wafts through the program, but overall Otonowa's music seems focused on skillful adaptability, upbeat resilience and modern jazz's continuity with traditions.

Driven by Tana's emphatically swinging yet colorfully diffused rhythms, pianist Hirahara sparkles in solos and comps fully and warmly. Masaru Koga is masterful across his array of instruments, especially the three saxophones; he's influenced by John Coltrane but projects himself through well-turned phrases and furious passion. Bassist Noriyuki "Ken" Okada is firmly in the pocket with Tana.

There are familiar touchstones—"Donguri Koro Koro" is based on "Rhythm" changes, "Temujin" launches from a bit of "Freedom Jazz Dance" and Tana's "Hope For Now" has Art Blakey-like strengths—but standout tracks also include the traditional "Toryanse" performed sans piano, Koga's shakuhachi (Japanese flute) feature "Kurodahushi" and "Astro Boy," an unexpectedly deep probing of the theme from a classic cartoon show.

—Howard Mandel

**Stars Across The Ocean:** Down Town; Temujin; Hamachidori; Toryanse; Stars Across The Ocean; Hope For Now; Kurodahushi; Jogashima No Ame; Tetsuwan Atomu; Nine Gates; Machiboke; Donguri Koro Koro; Nembutsu. (67:02)

**Personnel:** Akira Tana, drums; Art Hirahara, piano; Masaru Koga, saxophones, flute, shakuhachi, percussion; Noriyuki "Ken" Okada, bass.

Ordering info: [sonsofsound.com](http://sonsofsound.com)

## Ken Schaphorst Big Band *How To Say Goodbye*

JCA RECORDINGS 1602

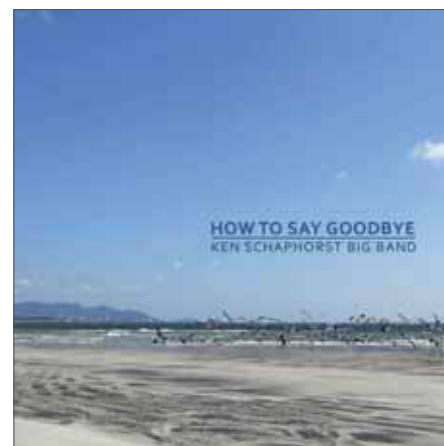
★★★★½

We've all had our fair share of goodbyes, and if these moments were meaningful, we mulled over how and what we would say or do. Composer and jazz educator Ken Schaphorst—chair of the Jazz Studies and Improvisation Department at the New England Conservatory in Boston—has crafted a sensational large-ensemble album with the intriguing title *How To Say Goodbye*.

For this project, Schaphorst assembled a 19-piece big band from former students and mentees to play 10 of his compositions. The result is exhilarating.

On the title track, John Carlson's virtuosic trumpet and a powerhouse closing statement by drummer Matt Wilson provide a glimpse of the excitement that is to come. Later, the superb tenorman Donny McCaslin's top-of-the-register solo is matched nicely by the soft backing of the band. Trombonist Curtis Hasselbring follows Schaphorst's delicate Fender Rhodes intro with a solo that begins gently and gradually builds to a crescendo, and McCaslin follows with another boiler.

This incredible album even provides a taste



of a dance-band feel with "Green City," Schaphorst's nod to Boston. Chris Cheek's gently swinging, highly melodic tenor work could fill the dance floor. This album is a must for big band fans.

—Bob Protzman

**How To Say Goodbye:** How To Say Goodbye; Blues For Herb; Mbira 1; Green City; Amnesia; Take Back The Country; Float; Mbira 2; Global Sweat; Descent. (70:29)

**Personnel:** Ken Schaphorst, Fender Rhodes, trumpet; Ralph Alessi, Dave Ballou, John Carlson, Tony Kadleck, flugelhorn, trumpets; Luis Bonilla, Curtis Hasselbring, Jason Jackson, trombones; Jennifer Wharton, bass trombone; Michael Thomas, clarinet, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone; Jeremy Udden, alto saxophone; Chris Cheek, Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophones; Brian Landrus, bass clarinet, baritone saxophone; Brad Sheplek, guitar; Jay Anderson, bass; Uri Caine, piano; Matt Wilson, drums; Jerry Leake, percussion.

Ordering info: [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com)



## Shared Vision, Common Spirit

We're living in troubling times. Fortunately for us, strong blasts of gospel, klezmer and spiritual Afropop offer much-needed relief. No allegiance to any religious faith necessary for listening.

Gospel pantheon vocalist **Mahalia Jackson's** remarkably raw yet dignified contralto deepens ***Moving On Up A Little Higher* (Shanachie 6066; 74:37 ★★★★★)**. This incalculably valuable new song collection, produced by gospel authority Anthony Heilbut, teems with 22 till-now lost concert or rehearsal performances that were recorded between 1946 and 1957. Influenced by Bessie Smith and other early blues women, Jackson deploys her amazing range and delivery to attain one extraordinary emotional peak after another. Aside from a happy reunion track with her mentor, pianist Tom Dorsey, Jackson is accompanied by her regular pianist Mildred Falls, who shares the great singer's penchant for spirit-feel rhythms. Included is a 20-page booklet written by Heilbut.

Ordering info: [shanachie.com](http://shanachie.com)

The specialness of **The Blind Boys of Alabama's** gift for sanctified harmony marks the return of their 2005 album ***Atom Bomb* (Omnivore 194; 60:40 ★★½)**. The breadth of the Blind Boys' power extends beyond strict church music into the late-1960s rock sphere of Norman Greenbaum's "Spirit In The Sky" and Blind Faith's "Presence Of The Lord." Praise goes to producer Chris Goldsmith for framing the singers' testimonies in rumbling bass-drum-organ settings further enriched by Charlie Musselwhite's harmonica contributions. The Gift of Gab (Timothy Parker) raps effectively on "Demons." For the reissue, seven mildly interesting instrumental tracks join the original ten songs.

Ordering info: [omnivorerecordings.com](http://omnivorerecordings.com)

**Candi Staton** has crafted a significant career through the decades as a Southern soul singer, a disco diva and a true believer. On her latest album, the gospel-oriented ***It's Time To Be Free* (Berach 13108; 68:40; ★★½)**, her distinctive voice purifies emotions and breathes with satisfaction over a state of grace. The first half of the program has a techno-dance music tilt, while the second half sounds more traditional and natural.

Ordering info: [candi-staton.com](http://candi-staton.com)

**The Klezmatics'** vibrant ***Apikorsim/Heretics* (World Village 450031; 62:24 ★★★★★)** picks up where their album ***Rise Up! Shteyt Oyf!*** left off in 2002. In other words, these enterprising New Yorkers have returned to neo-traditional Yiddish



Mahalia Jackson

COURTESY SHANACHIE ENTERTAINMENT

party music after years of recorded ventures into gospel, jazz or Woody Guthrie folk music. Lead singer/multi-instrumentalist Lorin Sklamberg and brass player Frank London and company provide original compositions and time-honored klezmer melodies that match an outrageous roller coaster for thrills. As the most madcap of klezmer bands, they are consistently conversant with conjuring musical beauty.

Ordering info: [klezmatics.com](http://klezmatics.com)

**Ezekiel's Wheels Klezmer Band**, in Boston, packs plenty of Jewish soul and dance spirit into the frisky original tunes and the refurbished historical fare these five excellent musicians present on their third enjoyable creation, ***Turning Point* (Self Release; 47:13 ★★½)**. Teary dialog between Nat Seelen's clarinet and Pete Fanelli's trombone on devotional song "Nat's Nign" is a highlight. Occasional nods to chamber music suit them well.

Ordering info: [ewklezmer.com](http://ewklezmer.com)

Over grooves sculpted by Western electric guitar, bass and drums, Mauritanian griot **Noura Mint Seymali** both sings and plays lute expressively about Islam and Western African desert life. The music of her second international release, ***Arbina* (Glitterbeat 038; 41:09 ★★½)** pivots on a web of different timbres and textures, forming a certain tension between modernity and tradition. The resulting trances, though, aren't as gripping as those of peers like Tinariwen or Aziza Brahim. **DB**

Ordering info: [glitterbeat.com](http://glitterbeat.com)

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## Yelena Eckemoff *Blooming Tall Phlox*

L&H PRODUCTION

★★★★

On *Blooming Tall Phlox*, an evocative and slow-burning album that mixes jazz and classical music with an experimental bent, composer and pianist Yelena Eckemoff paints programmatic audio pictures with her layered, rich compositions. From the first tune, it's apparent that isn't an album for casual listening. On tunes like the title track and "Fish Fried On Open Fire," Eckemoff weaves her spiky piano playing through luscious soundscapes that stand in for memories of her childhood in Russia.

Writing about her past is nothing new to Eckemoff, who loaded 2016's *Leaving Everything Behind* with songs about emigrating from Russia to North Carolina. Continuing that personal touch with *Blooming Tall Phlox*, Eckemoff has created tunes that display her passion for the subject matter. Now a tune like "Fish Fried On Open Fire" can't replicate the smell and feeling of that particular memory, but drummer Olavi Louhivuori creates sizzles and pops with his drums while Verner Pohjola produces a silky, dreamy melody from his trumpet.

—Jon Ross

**Blooming Tall Phlox:** Blooming Tall Phlox; Apples Laid Out On The Floor; Baba Lisa's Singer; Old-Fashioned Bread Store; Wildflower Meadows; Fish Fried On Open Fire; Sleeping In The Tent; Pine Needles Warmed By The Sun; Smoke From The House Chimneys In Frosty Air; Talks Over Hot Tea; Grandpa Lera's Bookcase; Clementines And Candies On Christmas Tree; Mommy's Shawl; Aunt Galya's Perfume; Scented Candles And Sparkling Wine. (60:38)

**Personnel:** Yelena Eckemoff, piano; Olavi Louhivuori, drums; Verner Pohjola, trumpet; Antti Lötjönen, bass; Panu Savolainen, vibraphone.

Ordering info: [landhproduction](http://landhproduction.com)



## Peter Kavanaugh *Look For The Silver Lining*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★

Los Angeles jazz guitarist Peter Kavanaugh operates in the tradition of such thoughtful plectrists as Jim Hall, Kenny Burrell and Ed Bickert. His new album is a fine collection of low-key small band performances, and while the material is largely familiar, the program contains surprises.

Kavanaugh is an unhurried player: He smoothes out Dave Brubeck's "It's A Raggy Waltz," luxuriates in the Latinate exotica of "La Rosita" and is relaxed on a brisk "Let's Fall In Love." His lyricism never flags and Kavanaugh assumes a variety of different sounds, creating different moods. Jonathan Dane's trumpet embroiders melodic contributions on three numbers but is especially soulful on "Rosita." Likewise, tenor saxophonists Kyle O'Donnell and Javier Vergara make short but affecting solo offerings. And who knew that punk rock drummer DJ Bonebrake could provide such sensitive vibraphone accompaniment throughout?

*Look For The Silver Lining* says all it has to say without overstaying its welcome. That's admirable in an era when "extended" recordings often try to make up for a lack of quality with quantity.

—Kirk Silsbee

**Look For The Silver Lining:** Look For The Silver Lining, East Of The Sun (West Of The Moon); It's A Raggy Waltz; Sunny; Let's Fall In Love; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; Our Day Will Come; Blue And Then You. (41:12)

**Personnel:** Peter Kavanaugh, guitar; DJ Bonebrake, vibraphone (1–3, 5–8), drums (4); Jonathan Dane, trumpet (1, 6, 7); Kyle O'Donnell, tenor saxophone (5, 8); Javier Vergara, tenor saxophone (3); David Tobocman, electric piano (4, 9); Paul Eckman, acoustic bass, electric bass (1–9); Mark San Filippo, drums (1–3, 5–9).

Ordering info: [peterkavanaughmusic.com](http://peterkavanaughmusic.com)



"He's got the heart to match his talent and an endless supply of imagination mixed with 'soul and science' that shines through every note." —Quincy Jones

[joeydefrancesco.com](http://joeydefrancesco.com)



"Billy Childs is a triple threat of music." —LA Times  
"An extravagantly polished pianist." —The New York Times

[billychilds.com](http://billychilds.com)



"Cameron's music has been inspiring me since I was thirteen years old and it still does today! I'm so glad he's sharing it with the world!" —Kamasi Washington

[camerongravesmusic.com](http://camerongravesmusic.com)





## Typhanie Monique *Call It Magic*

DOT TIME RECORDS 9059

★★★

Typhanie Monique reveals her approach to music with the first cut from her debut album as a leader. On "Magic," her lavish, r&b-tinged vocal is buffeted by an inviting, warm string section, amplified by her rhythm section. Experimentation, announcing a new voice as an artist, is the name of the game.

"Magic," a Coldplay cover, instantly sounds like a crossover hit destined for consumption by an audience unfamiliar with jazz music. On the tune, she presents herself in the vein of other female jazz singers who have bridged that gap, closing the song with a short bit of scatting that showcases her pliant vocals.

But on the rest of the album, Monique shows that she won't be put into any sort of genre box. This experimentation extends to a slightly funky, Fender Rhodes version of "Just Friends." Here she sings with a more delicate grain to her voice, approaching the tune as if it were a ballad. On actual ballads, such as "This Bitter Earth," she's even lovelier, ending her soulful phrases with a wide, slow vibrato. —Jon Ross

**Call It Magic:** Magic; Just Friends; This Bitter Earth; What Is This Thing Called Love; Heart Of The Matter; Where Is Love/Love Is; Called Love; Sister/Miss Celie's Blues; Letting My Love Go; Don't Get Around Much Anymore. (51:09)

**Personnel:** Typhanie Monique, vocals; Ben Lewis, piano, Fender Rhodes; Tony Monaco, Hammond B-3; Dana Hall, Greg Artry, drums; Felipe Fraga, percussion; Marques Carroll, Victor Garcia, trumpet; Ryan Schultz, bass trumpet; Paul Von Mertens, flute, baritone saxophone; Joel Frahm, tenor saxophone; Victor Goines, Ken Peplowski, clarinet; Jill Kaeding, Matt Agnew, cello; Neal Alger, guitar; Matthew Oliphant, French horn; Dominick Johnson, viola; Mark Agnor, Lori Ashikawa, Wendy Evans, Lisa Fako, Carmen Kassinger, Andrea Tolzmann, Katherine Hughes, Chihuan Yang, Carol Kalvonjian, violin.

**Ordering info:** [dottimerecords.com](http://dottimerecords.com)



## A.G.N.Z. *Chance Meeting*

WHALING CITY SOUND 082

★★★

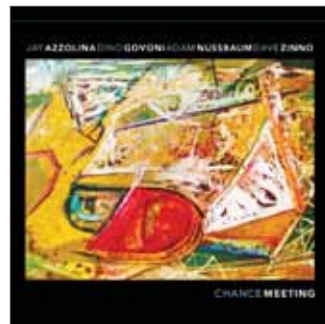
The most recognizable name in this democratic quartet is likely to be that of drummer Adam Nussbaum, who has had a most distinguished career and instigated the project. On *Chance Meeting*, he is joined by three equally talented musicians, all of whom bring some diverse compositions for the occasion.

The affair is usually upbeat, and when the band slows down, Jay Azzolina usually reaches for his acoustic guitar.

Unfortunately, on such opportunities, the material tends to fail them. Tenor saxophonist Dino Govoni's tribute "Lament For Michael Brecker" relies on a Latin feel that is a bit too pedestrian. The same can be said of bassist Dave Zinno's "14," a ballad that lacks in distinction despite a recurring motif played by Azzolina that is both intriguing and mournful.

Zinno, who is quite an imaginative player, fares much better with "Meatsauce," a piece set to a thick funk groove that features the fieriest exchange between Govoni and Azzolina. He brings his rock chops to the fore on the high-octane "1 Of 3," and his vamp on "Jimmy's Blues" shrouds the piece in a most enticing noir hue.

—Alain Drouot



**Chance Meeting:** Problem Child; N.T.I.; Lament For Michael Brecker; 1 Of 3; My Maia; Asha; Jimmy's Blues; 14; Meatsauce; Insight, Enlight. (56:37)

**Personnel:** Jay Azzolina, guitar; Dino Govoni, tenor saxophone; Dave Zinno, bass; Adam Nussbaum, drums.

**Ordering info:** [whalingcitysound.com](http://whalingcitysound.com)



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## Kendra Shank & Geoffrey Keezer *Half Moon: Live In New York*

RIDE SYMBOL  
★★★★★

Vocalist Shank and pianist Geoffrey Keezer are both masterful musicians, and they don't waste any time getting down to business. "Alone Together" opens up this set—recorded live in a friend's living room—with an exceptional display of the duo's strengths. Shank sings the opening verse with a quiet intensity, staying close to the original melody, while Keezer skitters in and out of time, adding unexpected triads to accent the lyrics. He drops a bass line that implies unfathomable ocean currents when Shank sings "our love is as deep as the sea," then they're off and running, reinventing the melody. Halfway through, they begin trading phrases, but it's hard to discern who's leading and who's following.

"Life's Mosaic"—Cedar Walton's "Mosaic," reinvented as a hymn to world peace—is particularly impressive. Keezer takes off on a free solo, with hints of Latin and classical music interspersed with a post-bop approach. Shank returns with a scat that suggest a seamless mix of Indian, Brazilian, Cuban and Native American techniques, as if speaking in tongues in her own unique language.

—j. poet

**Half Moon—Live In New York:** Alone Together; The Music Is The Magic; Kneel; Song Of Life; Half Moon; Life's Mosaic; When Love Was You And Me; I'm Movin' On; Healing Song; Your Are There; A Weaver Of Dreams. (66:45)

**Personnel:** Kendra Shank, vocals; Geoffrey Keezer, piano.

**Ordering info:** [ridesymbol.com](http://ridesymbol.com)



## Billy Childs *Rebirth*

MACK AVENUE  
★★★★½

Billy Childs ranks unquestionably among the top pianist-composers in jazz. A multiple Grammy winner (with 14 nominations and a slew of citations and various honors), Childs is what you might accurately describe as commanding, a talent as well-versed in classical composition as he is in jazz.

For his latest album, Childs has the excellent company of Steve Wilson on alto and soprano saxophones, Hans Glawischnig on acoustic bass and Eric Harland on drums. Ido Meshulam and Rogerio Boccato play trombone and percussion, respectively. Childs adds other voices—in fact two female vocalists—in Alicia Olatuja on "Stay" and Claudia Acuña on the title track.

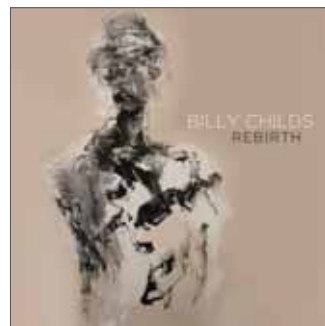
Childs and group open with "Peace," which here sounds almost prayerful. But after a Wilson solo, Childs increases the volume, perhaps expressing a shattered peace or the unlikelihood of peace. Other highlights include a gorgeous reading by all of "Windmills Of Your Mind" and a "Starry Night" on which the stars don't twinkle but explode and race around the sky. And we certainly can't overlook "Stay," a ballad Childs plays beautifully, mostly in the upper register.

—Bob Protzman

**Rebirth:** Backwards Bop; Rebirth; Stay; Dance Of Shiva; Tightrope; The Starry Night; The Windmills Of Your Mind; Peace. (57:00)

**Personnel:** Billy Childs, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Eric Harland, drums; Steve Wilson, saxophone; Alicia Olatuja, Claudia Acuña, vocals; Ido Meshulam, trombone; Rogerio Boccato, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [mackavenue.com](http://mackavenue.com)



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Andrew Simpkins (left), Gene Harris and Bill Dowdy are the Three Sounds.



FRANCIS WOLFF © MOSAIC IMAGES LLC (SIMPKINS, HARRIS, DOWDY)

## Magic on the Bandstand

Everyone in jazz—musicians, singers, listeners—look for magic on the bandstand. It doesn't happen often, but when the artists, material, format and setting all align in a special way, everyone knows they've just heard something extraordinary. New issues of previously unreleased live recordings by titans of other ages show that the quest begins anew every night.

Pianist **Gene Harris** may not have been a groundbreaker, but his Three Sounds was a reliable touring trio that never failed to delight with its endless grooves. Culled from 1964-'68 stops at Seattle's Penthouse, **Groovin' Hard (Resonance 2025; 54:50 ★★★½)** is predictably solid in its impressive array of hard-bop devices and, yes, clichés. Block chords, blues structures, gospel flourishes and charging rhythms abound.

Ordering info: [resonancerecords.org](http://resonancerecords.org)

In 1980, bebop progenitor **Dizzy Gillespie** had already been canonized by mainstream media when he appeared in Montreal with an all-star sextet that recalled the Giants of Jazz reunion he toured with a decade earlier. **Concert Of The Century—A Tribute To Charlie Parker (Justin Time 259-2; 58:13 ★★★½)** captures the trumpet master with saxophonist James Moody, vibraphonist Milt Jackson, pianist Hank Jones, bassist Ray Brown and drummer Philly Joe Jones. It's doubtful that Gillespie's working band of the day pushed him like his contemporaries in this outfit. If his trumpet couldn't leap into the stratosphere in a heartbeat or his execution wasn't as clean as in years previous, Dizzy still had a

lot of lateral fire and thoughtful warmth in his playing.

Ordering info: [justin-time.com](http://justin-time.com)

**Chet Baker's** decline is well documented by his many later recordings with an endless parade of local rhythm sections all over Europe and America. By 1980, the trumpeter had switched to the more forgiving flugelhorn, and though his performances were hit-or-miss, he could enchant with tragic eloquence. On **Live In London (Ubuntu 0003; 63:51/58:02 ★★★★★)** he has a sharp and simpatico rhythm section in pianist John Horler, bassist Jim Richardson and drummer Tony Mann. The album should be a revelation, even to the staunchest Bakerphiles. At London's Canteen Club, the lyricism is prodigious and Baker is clearly inspired—as though he had something to prove.

Ordering info: [weareubuntumusic.com](http://weareubuntumusic.com)

Alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz's** 1999 pairing with the marvelous trumpeter **Kenny Wheeler** in Germany, **Olden Times—Live At Birdland Neuburg (Double Moon 71146; 78:31 ★★★½)**, is an example of high-level improvisation. That it's so casual is part of their lightning-in-a-jar alchemy. Pianist Frank Wunsch and bassist Gunnar Plümer buoy the duo, framing and propelling Konitz and Wheeler in the best way. The absence of a drummer is never an issue with Plümer's strong pulse: it adds to the effect of the horns floating over the contours of the well-chosen tunes—originals by Konitz and Wheeler.

Ordering info: [challengerecords.com](http://challengerecords.com)

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**Nick Finzer**  
**Hear & Now**  
 OUTSIDE IN MUSIC 1701  
 ★★★★★

Trombonist Nick Finzer has put together a crack band, and, on *Hear & Now*, their third album, the music seems to flow from track to track. It's not the only album out at the moment that takes aim at a society at odds with itself, especially at a time of "deep uncertainty," as the liner notes suggest. But *Hear & Now* can be enjoyed on both a musical level as well as an extra-musical one.

Across eight originals and one cover—

Duke Ellington's "Since Petal Of A Rose"—there's a pattern of alternating uptempo fare with softer hues. And while the fiery ones are a delight, starting with the clarion-call swinger "We The People," it's the mood-setters that this listener was drawn to more often. The album ends with a lovely ballad, a bumper sticker to remember called "Love Wins."

That said, there's something about that first tune that sounds like a big-band chart, even though the front line is only manned by Finzer and saxophonist Lucas Pino. All the band's elements show up, with a riveting rhythm section featuring pianist Glenn Zaleski, guitarist Alex Wintz, bassist Dave Baron and drummer Jimmy Macbride.

Produced by Ryan Truesdell, *Hear & Now* shows Finzer's knack for leadership, especially in the way he shares the space. This is evident with unexpected solo spots across several songs, with voices heard in unlikely places alongside Finzer's own evocative solos. Alternate voices come from colorist Pino on bass clarinet, and, especially, a patient and sweet Zaleski playing the song's only solo.

—John Ephland

**Hear & Now:** We The People; The Silent One; Single Petal Of A Rose; Again And Again; Race To The Bottom; New Beginnings; Lullaby For An Old Friend; Dance Of Persistence; Love Wins. (58:00)  
**Personnel:** Nick Finzer, trombone; Lucas Pino, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Alex Wintz, guitar; Glenn Zaleski, piano; Dave Baron, bass; Jimmy Macbride, drums.

**Ordering info:** [outsideinmusic.com](http://outsideinmusic.com)

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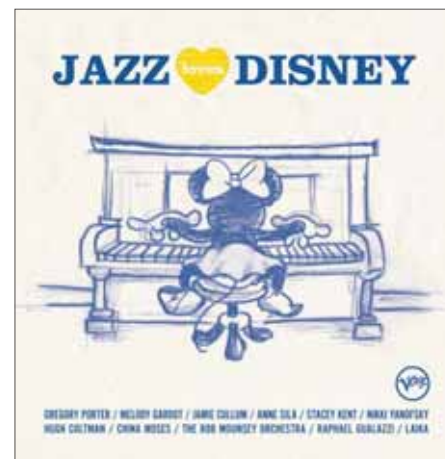
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**Various Artists**  
**Jazz Loves Disney**  
 VERVE 602557118988  
 ★★★★★

Walt Disney isn't the first celebrity you think of when you hear the word *jazz*, but he was a life-long fan of the music and took great care when hiring composers for his films. Listeners of a certain age will be familiar with most of these songs, but this all-star compilation avoids the taint of nostalgia with arrangements that reinvent even the most familiar tunes.

Stacey Kent sings "Bibbidi Bobbodo Boo" in French, with the band slipping into a soft bossa nova groove. A live string section provides romantic accents to set up a Jim Tomlinson saxophone solo that dances around the melody without getting too far-out. Gregory Porter phrases the opening verse of "When You Wish Upon A Star" like Nat "King" Cole, before slipping into his own warm, open tones. Anne Sila brings a fiery exuberance to her rendition of "Let It Go," a tune from *Frozen* that's rather sedate in the film.

Laika's take on "Once Upon A Dream" is both hopeful and forlorn, and Glenn Patscha's moody piano and Ira Coleman's understated standup bass give it the feel of a smoky, late-night jazz standard. "I Wanna Be Like You," from *The Jungle Book*, gets two treatments.



The Hot Sardines provide a swinging, gypsy jazz-meets-Dixieland version, and Raphaël Gualazzi brings a touch of Latin jazz to a take highlighted by a playful piano solo and a care-free vocal.

—j. poet

**Jazz Loves Disney:** Everybody Wants To Be A Cat; He's A Tramp; Bibbidi Bobbodo Boo; When You Wish Upon A Star; Why Don't You Do Right; I Wanna Be Like You; A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes; You've Got A Friend In Me; Let It Go; The Bare Necessities; Once Upon A Dream; Un Jour Mon Prince Viendra; I Wanna Be Like You. (48:01)

**Personnel:** Jamie Cullum (1), Melody Gardot (2, 11), Stacey Kent (3), Gregory Porter (4), China Moses (5), Raphaël Gualazzi (6, 11), Hugh Coltman (8), Anne Sila (9), Laika, vocals; Nikki Yanofsky (12); The Rob Mounsey Orchestra (7); Elizabeth Bougerol (13), vocals; The Hot Sardines (13); Glenn Patscha, piano; Ira Coleman, bass; Jim Tomlinson, saxophone (2).

**Ordering info:** [vervelabelgroup.com](http://vervelabelgroup.com)



# Bohemian Rhapsodies

You may know "bop apocalypse" as chapter two in **Martin Torgoff's** 2004 chronological of the drug breakout of the 1960s and beyond, *Can't Find My Way Home*. It was a brief review of the Beat Generation as precursor to the book's main subject, the hippie drug culture. In ***Bop Apocalypse: Jazz, Race, the Beats, and Drugs*** (De Capo Press), he expands it into an absorbing 400-page prequel on the underground gestation of the Beats and modern jazz when drugs became the cotton candy of the ultra-cognoscenti.

The Beat movement was born deconstructed. Its legacy was not an idea but a shrug that made coolness a tactic of provocation. It was the essence of the American spiritual left in its furtive prime. It protested no war, no injustice, no particular evil. It took on the whole of the American dream at the crest of its fulfillment. In its attack on a spiritually corrupt materialism, the Beats saw in black life an alternative to everything its own white, bourgeois, uptight culture lacked.

That's why "the writers of the Beat Generation were deeply influenced by the culture of jazz," Torgoff writes. Beyond that, the roots of the Baby Boom counterculture itself "are to be found in jazz and the Beat Generation, two subcultures that comingled beginning in the 1940s and continuing up through the 1950s." But that "commingling" was between two discrete undergrounds, linked more by a culture of drug addiction than a dedication to art. For the literary underground especially, its love of jazz was largely unrequited. While it saw its own alienation mirrored in bebop and tried to live by its imagined codes of hipness, Torgoff doesn't find a single bop musician who ever actually read a Beat poet or novelist.

His early chapters draw a pre-war history of marijuana. Aside from presenting jazz and drugs as symbols of cultural revolt, it's a lengthy prologue to the main story, which begins during the war. But we do meet Federal Bureau of Narcotics Chief Harry Anslinger, the arch villain of the piece. His 1936 propaganda film, *Reefer Madness*, created a public panic over pot that echoed for decades. He weaves in and out of the story for 30 years, a stalking menace of institutional evil. By chapter 10 we come to the literary figures who will define the Beats and their search for sacramental meaning in drugs: Herbert Huncke, William

S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Neal Cassady and others. Finally by page 129, Kerouac discovers the Harlem jazz scene and finds in it everything he and his compatriots want to be. Lester Young introduces him to marijuana in 1943, and the game is on.

But if pot was the drug of swing, "heroin marked the transition ... to bop," in which the Beats found its second sacrament. Torgoff gives us profiles of the usual junkie-icons—Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Jackie McLean, Miles Davis and others. All are black and seem oddly apart from the Beats. For the white hep cat, heroin was mere-

ly a matter of identity—the rejection of squareness in a pose of "cool existentialism." To the black musician it was more pragmatic—an anesthetic to racism.

It also points up an important piece of the story that isn't here. Nowhere does Torgoff discuss the many white boppers who became junkies and assumed a more prominent place in the Beat orbit. Gerry Mulligan, Red Rodney, Chet Baker, even Lenny Bruce—all close fellow travelers. Al Cohn, and Zoot Sims actually recorded with Kerouac.

Torgoff has given us an insightful history of the changing art of hipness. As the Beat Generation lost its cohesive hipness and literary chic, the public moved on, as did jazz, which had always moved to its own inner lights, anyway.

Ordering info: [dacapopress.com](http://dacapopress.com)

For a different view of the post-war jazz scene, there is ***Soul Jazz: Jazz in the Black Community, 1945–1976*** (Xlibris), published by author **Bob Porter**. Porter breaks fresh ground by showing us the jazz world from a distinctly black perspective. He focuses on black performers such as Buddy Johnson, Erskine Hawkins, Louis Jordan, Roy Milton, Jack McVea and Gene Ammons, who built their stardom within the African-American community through clubs, radio stations and labels that seldom reached white audiences. "They had their own heroes," he says, "and black fans of jazz had their own way of responding to the music." It was a scene that the Beats could only romanticize as tourists and few whites were interested in exploring. Porter conveys its value with clarity. **DB**

Ordering info: [bookstore.xlibris.com](http://bookstore.xlibris.com)



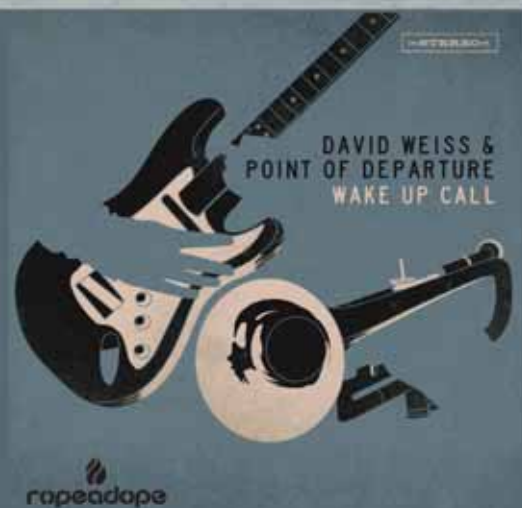
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Drawing influence from the paradoxical nature of the simple yet complex but grooving music of the late '60s and early '70s, *Point of Departure* offers an inventive sound that is "abstract, mysterious and aggressive" (Detroit Free Press) and brilliantly toys with the "style and repertory of 1960s postbop, with contemporary urgency" (NY Times). "Wake Up Call" features a more groove oriented re-vamped version of the band built around two new startlingly impressive young guitarists, Ben Eunson and Travis Reuter, that ties the group's sounds into one riveting and poignant force.





## Gustav Lundgren, Jorge Rossy & Doug Weiss *Jazz, Vol. 1*

LUNDGREN MUSIC/PLUGGED RECORDS

★★★★

If the truism holds that Jerome Kern's timeless standard "All The Things You Are" is a prime test of a jazz player's mettle and vitality in the pursuit of "playing changes," Swedish guitar master Gustav Lundgren passes with flying colors on his latest album. With his masterful sense of touch, fluid phrasing and an inventive blend of single line work, chordal moves and register leaps, Lundgren easily seizes our atten-

tion and keeps us tuned in.

"Things" arrives as the second of seven tracks on this calmly bedazzling album, between the inviting prowess of "Invitation" and another Bronislaw Kaper tune, "On Green Dolphin Street." Songbook choices also include "Gone With The Wind," an uptempo take on Jobim's "Triste" and Irving Berlin's "They Say It's Wonderful." We've heard these standards countless times by now, but are reminded of their renewable power to move in able hands.

Yes, this is literally a jazz standards session with an almost dogmatic self-descriptive title and a declarative statement of straightahead, clean-toned jazz guitar. But the album teems with fluid virtuosity and, more importantly, a centering sense of musicality. This is volume one of two, recorded in mostly one take, in one day, last spring in the Spanish village of Begues. Lundgren has spent time living in Spain, and worked in various settings with Spanish drummer Jorge Rossy for several years now, with tasteful and agile bassist Doug Weiss being a newer ally. But the threesome gets along famously, in ways both relaxed and fit to burst with musical intensity.

—Josef Woodard

**Jazz, Vol. 1:** Invitation; All The Things You Are; On Green Dolphin Street; How About You?; Gone With The Wind; Triste; They Say It's Wonderful; Where Are You? (40:10)

**Personnel:** Gustav Lundgren, guitar; Doug Weiss, bass; Jorge Rossy, drums.

**Ordering info:** [lundgrenmusic.com](http://lundgrenmusic.com)

## Mads Tolling & The Mads Men *Playing The 60s*

MADSMAN RECORDS/CITY HALL RECORDS 03

★★★

The concept is clever: an album consisting of familiar tunes from the 1960s. Idea-wise, that gets *Playing The 60s* halfway through the critical door. But do the performances take it all the way toward a rave review?

Make no mistake, there is some serious blowing here. Violinist Mads Tolling's solo on "Mission: Impossible" double-times the funky strut of the groove and leads briskly to a punchy outro and coda—the famous Lalo Schiffrin lick, a moment of churning bass courtesy of Sam Bevan, two quiet notes and *fini*.

But disappointing moments prevail. For some reason, an accordion dominates "What A Wonderful World," not with Piazzola passion but more of a wedding-band wheeze. As for Kenny Washington's guest vocal, it is as pure and polished as Tolling's backup fills. That very quality creates an impression of starry-eyed dazzle, as opposed to Louis Armstrong's definitive delivery on the original version.

Jump to the two last tracks, which somewhat redeem *Playing The 60s*. A 5/4 version of "Hawaii 5-0" finds keyboardist Colin Hogan recasting the theme with jazz voicings, and Bevan's chart



leaving lots of air for the soloists to stretch out. Then we come to the one tune that predates the '60s, unless we're talking the 1660s. With Tolling and guest bassist Stanley Clarke playing together, the North German hymn "Beautiful Savior" becomes a masterful dialogue, executed with solemnity and swing. —Bob Doerschuk

**Playing The 60s:** A Taste Of Honey; Meet The Flintstones; Georgia On My Mind; My Girl; The Pink Panther; All Along The Watchtower; The Look Of Love; Merry Medley; Mission: Impossible; A Time For Us; The Good, The Bad And The Ugly; What A Wonderful World; Peter Gunn; Hawaii 5-0; Beautiful Savior. (70:44)

**Personnel:** Mads Tolling, violin; Colin Hogan, keyboards; Sam Bevan, bass; Eric Garland, drums; Spencer Day (7), Kenny Washington (12), Kall Wilson, vocals; Stanley Clarke (15), Daniel Feiszli, bass; Ricardo Peixoto, guitar; Joe Hebert, Susanna Porte, cello.

**Ordering info:** [madstolling.com](http://madstolling.com)



## Harriet Tubman *Araminta*

SUNNYSIDE 1459

★★★★

Although not credited in its title, this well-established New York trio's latest album boasts a major collaborator. When crackling trumpet tendrils spike between the heavily altered guitar strings of Brandon Ross and Melvin Gibbs, the listener might be imagining the likely guesting presence of Graham Haynes. But instead, it's Wadada Leo Smith, here found in a less-than-familiar electrified setting. He's present on most tracks, so he's much more than a guest artist, but rather a seriously steeped equal partner.

The thick, swirling soundscape is introduced right away, with Gibbs (bass) and Ross (guitar) clouding their traditional roles. They are fuzzed, scuffed, distorted and otherwise processed, this being their accustomed state. There's an improvisatory nature to these pieces, mostly culminating at the six- or seven-minute mark.

A cinematic roiling of dark clouds dominates "Taken," shot with the lightning of the ax gods, the drums of JT Lewis stalking with a compatibly thundering, circular motion. Ross adds shards of harp-like samples to "Blacktal Fractal," presumably close-ups snatched from his own guitar.

It's hard to resist thoughts of Don Cherry or Miles Davis when hearing Smith existing on this electrified terrain. "Nina Simone" follows the Davis tradition of naming a tune after a celebrity, given a softer touch, at least for a while, but gradually getting meatier as it slugs slowly onwards. Most of the album's pieces are not too dissimilar, but this is no disadvantage given the extreme texturing, atmosphere-building goals of its creators.

—Martin Longley

**Araminta:** The Spiral Path To The Throne; Taken; Blacktal Fractal; Ne Ander; Nina Simone; Real Cool Killers; President Obama's Speech At The Selma Bridge; Sweet Araminta. (46:00)

**Personnel:** Brandon Ross, guitar; Melvin Gibbs, bass; JT Lewis, drums; Wadada Leo Smith, trumpet.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysidezone.com](http://sunnysidezone.com)



## Nathan East *Reverence*

YAMAHA  
ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

★★★★★

You say you've lost your groove and can't come up with a cure? Well, worry no longer. Bassist Nathan East is here with a tonic guaranteed to solve the problem. It's his new CD, which is highly entertaining and will quickly lift the listener's spirits.

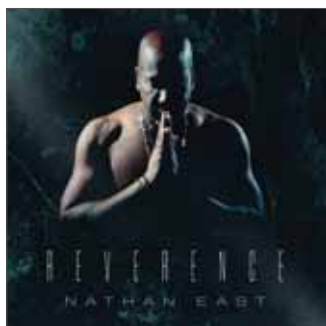
*Reverence* is not a straightforward jazz album, although there are scattered references to the genre, but jazz purists will be impressed with his heavy backbeat, which lays the groundwork for a style blending funk, soul and r&b into a single groove.

That said, the music here offers considerable variety, so listeners of all tastes are sure to find something they'll get into. The opening "Love's Holiday" is a good example of what to expect. It's a groove-heavy love song featuring a funky bass solo and an ethereal-sounding vocal chorus. "Serpentine Fire," by Earth, Wind & Fire, is another highlight—with a twist. After the tape was digitally remastered, the three Earth, Wind & Fire members sang (Philip Bailey), played additional bass parts (Verdine White) and added percussion (Ralph Johnson) to the track.

—Bob Protzman

**Reverence:** Love's Holiday; Lifecycle; Elevenate; Serpentine Fire; Feels Like Home; Higher Ground; The Mood I'm In; Over The Rainbow; Shadow; Pagan; Why Not This Sunday; Until We Meet Again. (58:00)  
**Personnel:** Nathan East, bass; Philip Bailey, vocals (1, 4); Chuck Loeb, guitar; Verdine White (4), bass; Ralph Jackson (4), percussion; Yolanda Adams, vocals (5); Kirk Whalum, saxophone (6); Nikki Yandesky, vocals (7); Noah East, piano (8); Chick Corea, keyboards (9); Ruben Studdard, vocals (11).

Ordering info: [yamahaentertainmentgroup.com](http://yamahaentertainmentgroup.com)



## Steven Kirby *Illuminations*

WHALING CITY SOUND 084

★★★½

From the first notes of *Illuminations*, an entrancing record full of musical twists and turns, the wordless vocals of singer Aubrey Johnson add an otherworldly layer to the otherwise straightforward proceedings. On "Parabola," she thickens the melody with a haunting, round alto tone. This nearly ties Kirby to the feeling of records like Return to Forever's *Light As A Feather*—a sound very much of a certain time and place.

And although there are fusion twinges and obvious hallmarks of that Chick Corea group and ensembles like Weather Report, Kirby's enthusiastic playing distinguishes the music from these precursors. Saxophonist Bill Vint burns hot and bright on tenor, a reedy edge to his playing.

On the title track, Kirby's detailed bebop filigree is posed as background wanderings supporting Johnson's wordless vocals, but Kirby plays with such commitment that his line becomes the focus of the song; take that away, and everything would fall apart. On "Over The Rainbow," Johnson introduces a bubbly tension that simmers under the song's surface. The arrangement is engaging, though Johnson is better utilized when singing syllables on uptempo tunes.

—Jon Ross



**Illuminations:** Parabola; I Hear A Rhapsody; Illuminations; Beautiful Rain; Lake Of Stars; Slow Circle; May The 4th Be With You; A Luz Das Estrelas; Over The Rainbow; Returning; Last Song. (65:15)  
**Personnel:** Steven Kirby, guitars; Mark Shilansky (2, 7), John Funkhouser (1, 3, 5, 9, 11), Steve Hunt (3), piano, keyboards; Bill Vint, tenor saxophone flute (1–3, 5, 7); Ed Lucie (2, 7), Greg Loughman (1, 3–6, 9–11), bass; Mike Connors, drums; Aubrey Johnson, vocals (1, 3, 5, 9).

Ordering info: [whalingcitysound.com](http://whalingcitysound.com)

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## MUSICIANS' GEAR GUIDE

# BEST OF THE 2017 NAMM SHOW

The music-products industry gathered in Southern California Jan. 19–22 for The NAMM Show, an annual showcase for new instruments and gear. As globe-spanning members of the National Association of Music Merchants joined together to do business, a cast of visiting musicians—in the roles of endorsers, presenters and performers at the convention's after-hours concerts, all-star jams and awards ceremonies—could be heard echoing across the campus of the Anaheim Convention Center. In the following pages, DownBeat presents the best of The 2017 NAMM Show.

Reporting by Žaneta Čuntová, Ed Enright, Kasia Fejklowicz, Alex Harrell, Katie Kailus, Bobby Reed and Brian Zimmerman







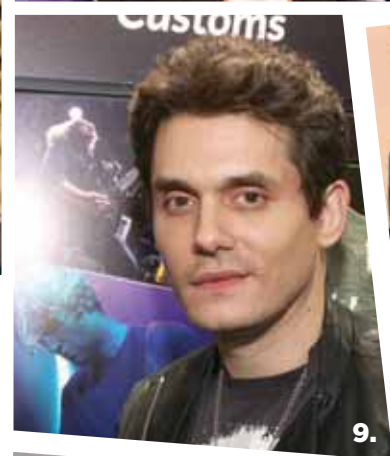
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1. Mark Guiliana at the Sabian booth. 2. Ronnie Spector performs on the Nissan NAMM Grand Plaza Stage (Getty Images for NAMM). 3. Actor Johnny Depp (left) joins Les Paul Award recipient Joe Perry onstage at the TEC Awards (Getty Images for NAMM). 4. Stevie Wonder (Getty Images for NAMM). 5. George Benson with his 40th Anniversary Ibanez Signature Model. 6. Dr. Lonnie Smith, a Hammond Organ endorser, with comedian Sinbad (Getty Images for NAMM). 7. Engineer/producer Jack Douglas is inducted into the TEC Awards Hall of Fame (Getty Images for NAMM). 8. Bob Weir performs at the D'Angelico Guitars booth. 9. John Mayer was spotted at the PRS Guitars booth (Getty Images for NAMM). 10. Eric Marienthal (left), Jerry Vivino and Roxy Coss with Clayton Cameron (background) at Vandoren's VandoJam. 11. Omar Hakim (left) and Rachel Z take part in a NAMM Idea Center interview. 12. Sal Crocker (left), Keyan Williams and Don Braden at the JodyJazz/Légère/BG Jazz Jam. 13. Robbie Robertson speaks during a "Breakfast of Champions" session (Getty Images for NAMM). 14. Richie Sambora performs (Getty Images for NAMM). 15. Eric Benét sings at the IK Multimedia booth. 16. Sabian President Andy Zildjian with the company's Elite series cymbals.



# BAND & ORCHESTRA



## REAL BOOK PLAY-ALONGS

Hal Leonard's Real Book Multi-Tracks series uses songs from the Real Books in new play-along packs. Each book includes lead sheets for C, B-flat, E-flat and bass clef instruments and customizable audio tracks that can be accessed online for 10 songs. The online audio interface includes tempo control, looping, buttons to turn each instrument on or off, and melody performed by a saxophone or trumpet on the "head in" and "head out."

**More info:** [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)



## LIGHT HORN

The XO Professional Brass 1602S-LTR is a lightweight B-flat professional trumpet with a .460-inch medium-large bore size, nickel-silver mouthpiece receiver, reverse rose-brass leadpipe, one-piece 5-inch yellow brass bell with fast taper, and yellow brass valve casings, balusters and tuning slides. **More info:** [xobrass.com](http://xobrass.com)

## SONIC ROAR

The Super Jet saxophone mouthpiece series from JodyJazz delivers a brighter and more focused sound that the company's original Jet series. The mouthpiece was created with smooth-jazz, rock and funk players in mind. Currently available in an alto saxophone model, the Super Jet comes in size 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 tip openings.

**More info:** [jodyjazz.com](http://jodyjazz.com)



## FLEXIBLE TENOR PIECE

The Select Jazz Tenor Saxophone Mouthpiece from D'Addario Woodwinds captures the classic sound and response of vintage mouthpieces, with even intonation across the entire range of the instrument. Featuring a long rollover baffle leading into a medium chamber, as well as a long facing curve, the tenor mouthpiece offers ease of projection and flexibility without sacrificing sound quality.

**More info:** [daddario.com](http://daddario.com)



## DOWN-LOW 'BONES

Schilke has released two Greenhoe bass trombones: the B series orchestral model GB5 with a one-piece 9.5-inch bell and the more versatile C series model GC5 with a two-piece 9.5-inch bell. All Greenhoe bass trombones include the famous Greenhoe valve (pictured) and are offered with custom options.

**More info:** [schilkemusic.com](http://schilkemusic.com)

## VINTAGE FINISH

Yamaha's limited-edition 50th Anniversary Custom Z Alto Saxophone features a vintage bronze finish, metal right-hand thumb hook and metal left-hand thumb button for added response, vibrancy and flexibility. The instrument also features intricate engraving on the neck that "pops" against the dark-tinted finish. **More info:** [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)



## HANDCRAFTED TRUMPET

B.A.C., known for custom brass instruments that are handcrafted in Kansas City, has introduced the Custom Paseo trumpet as a regular production model. It features a one-piece hand-hammered bell and provides a rich, powerful, resonant sound.

**More info:** [bacmusic.com](http://bacmusic.com)



## SAX MEETS SYNTH

Roland's Aerophone AE-10 is a USB-equipped digital wind instrument with advanced breath-sensor technology. Powered by Roland's SuperNATURAL engine, the Aerophone AE-10 provides a selection of saxophone and woodwind sounds as well as other acoustic instrument sounds, plus synthesizer sounds optimized for breath control. **More info:** [roland.com](http://roland.com)



## BARI REED

Vandoren now offers V16 reeds for baritone saxophone. The thickest of the Vandoren jazz cuts, V16 reeds have a full, husky sound and strong attack.

**More info:** [vandoren-en.com](http://vandoren-en.com)







**40<sup>TH</sup>**  
**Anniversary**

# GEORGE BENSON

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SIGNATURE GUITARS

George Benson and Ibanez began a creative journey forty years ago. It started with the goal of building a guitar suited to please a master jazz musician. Along the way, a legendary instrument was created for guitarists of every genre, all over the world. Now, Ibanez proudly celebrates with the release of two Limited Edition 40th Anniversary Models.

***Ibanez***



**GB40TH**  
(40 available worldwide)

**GB40THII**  
(available through 2017 only)





## CUSTOMIZABLE CONSOLE

PreSonus' StudioLive 32 digital console and recorder is fully recallable, with 33 touch-sensitive, motorized faders and 33 recallable XMAX preamps. The new 40-input console further improves on the StudioLive line's ease of use while letting users customize its workflow and operations to fit the way they work. **More info: [presonus.com](http://presonus.com)**

## ELITE MAKEOVER

Yorkville Sound has updated its flagship Elite Loudspeaker series to feature new construction materials, proprietary woofers and horn drivers, redesigned horns and a new amplifier design. Beyond upgraded components, Yorkville has introduced an iOS and Android control app to help users fine-tune the EQ and limiter settings via Bluetooth connectivity. **More info: [yorkville.com](http://yorkville.com)**



## NEXT-GENERATION TWIN

A redesign of the Apollo Twin, the Apollo Twin MkII desktop recording interface from Universal Audio features onboard realtime UAD-2 Solo, Duo and Quad Core processing. It improves on the original Apollo Twin's audio quality with redesigned A/D and D/A conversion. **More info: [uaudio.com](http://uaudio.com)**



## WIRELESS WONDER

Sennheiser's XS Wireless 1 radio microphone series consists of six wireless mic sets that boast fast setup and reliable transmission. Users are ready to perform within seconds due to automatic frequency management with one-touch synchronization and intuitive controls. All XS Wireless 1 sets come with receiver, transmitter, microphone capsule or instrument cable, power supply unit and batteries. **More info: [sennheiser.com](http://sennheiser.com)**



## ESSENTIALS UPGRADE

Blue Mic's enhanced Essentials series now features the Spark SL (pictured), Bluebird SL and Baby Bottle SL. Each mic features a new streamlined build and refined sonics, along with a versatile 100Hz high-pass filter and -20dB pad. The series provides the flexibility to track a wide variety of sound sources with nuance and power. **More info: [bluemic.com](http://bluemic.com)**



## RECORDING IN PROCESS

The Q2n Handy Video Recorder from Zoom is a portable camera that gives musicians the power to create HD videos with great-sounding audio. Ideal for capturing live performances and rehearsal sessions, the Q2n is equipped with a high-quality built-in X/Y microphone, 160-degree wide-angle lens and intuitive controls—all in the most compact form factor ever created by Zoom. **More info: [zoom-na.com](http://zoom-na.com)**



## HIGH-SPL MIC SYSTEMS

Audio-Technica's new ATM350a Microphone Systems offer crisp, well-balanced response even in very high-SPL applications. The ATM350a Cardioid Condenser Instrument Microphone comes in six specially designed systems that provide discreet, rock-solid mounting solutions for a wide range of instruments, including woodwinds, strings, brass, percussion, drums and piano. **More info: [audio-technica.com](http://audio-technica.com)**



## COMPACT SOUND

Offering high-fidelity sound in a compact size, Roland's Rubix audio interfaces for Mac, PC and iPad offer crucial features for today's musicians and producers. The line consists of the Rubix 22, 24 and 44. Each multi-platform interface is engineered to have extremely low noise from input to output. The line boasts clean, detailed sound with transparent, low-noise mic preamps and support for audio resolutions up to 24-bit/192kHz. **More info: [roland.com](http://roland.com)**





## VIBRANT BRUSH

A great choice for jazz, folk and music that requires a light touch, Los Cabos' bamboo brushes include an adjustable O-ring that controls how tightly the bamboo is gripped, allowing for a variance in sound and articulation. Bamboo produces a louder, more vibrant sound than typical brushes. The tensile strength of the bamboo makes them nearly impossible to break.

**More info:** [loscabosdrumsticks.com](http://loscabosdrumsticks.com)



## ELITE SOUND

Sabian's Elite cymbals take the Artisan line deeper, darker and dirtier. Extensive multi-peen and high-density hammering is one of the factors that contribute to the Elite sound, which is lower-pitched and drier than other Artisan cymbals. Their unique lathing and flatter, lower-profile bell also result in a woody bell tone that's more integrated into the overall cymbal sound.

**More info:** [sabian.com](http://sabian.com)



## DYNAMIC RANGE

Paiste's Masters series is a collection of handcrafted cymbals made of CuSn20 bronze to achieve superior sound ideals in various genres, including jazz and acoustic-rooted music. The 20-, 22- and 24-inch Thins and corresponding 14-, 15- and 16-inch Thin Hi-Hats provide all-around capability and multi-functionality.

**More info:** [paiste.com](http://paiste.com)



## MODERN JAZZ

Vic Firth's Modern Jazz Collection was developed with top drummers, including Jeff Ballard, Greg Hutchinson, Joe McCarthy and Lewis Nash. It includes the MJC 1, MJC 2, MJC 3, MJC 4 and MJC 5. **More info:** [vicfirth.com](http://vicfirth.com)

## MUSICAL BALANCE

Evans Drumheads' UV1 features a 10-mil film known for its warmer tonal characteristics while being more resistant to stretching and denting. Combined with Evans' Level 360 Technology, the UV1 offers a wide range of sonic possibilities and musical applications. The added benefit of increased surface texture makes the UV1 extremely responsive to brush playing, while a UV-cured coating provides unmatched durability. **More info:** [evansdrumheads.com](http://evansdrumheads.com)



## MAPLE ANNIVERSARY

Based on Yamaha's Absolute Hybrid Maple series, the 50th anniversary drum set offers expressive tone and wide dynamic range and features shells available in birdseye maple in an Amber Sunburst finish and curly maple in an Antique Natural finish. The limited-edition kit's shells are adorned with gold lugs, in an aesthetic nod to the first Yamaha Maple Custom drum sets, introduced in 1991.

**More info:** [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)

## DRY, FUNKY SOUND

The raw and earthy cymbals of Zildjian's K Custom Special Dry collection deliver a dry, funky sound with lots of dirt. A three-step hammering process, distinctive shape and extra-thin weight give the cymbals a fast attack, while shutting down quickly with just enough sustain. There are 15 models, from 10-inch splashes to 23-inch rides. **More info:** [zildjian.com](http://zildjian.com)



# GUITARS & AMPS



## CLEAN & INTIMATE

The JC-22 Jazz Chorus guitar amplifier offers Roland's classic JC clean tone in a light, compact amp that's ideal for playing at home. Offering the essential features of Roland's JC-40 in a scaled-down size, the JC-22 also works well for intimate performances and recording. **More info: [roland.com](http://roland.com)**



## MAKIN' MAGIC

Supro has released extension speaker cabinets featuring late-'50s-era Supro cosmetics, partially open-back construction and custom-made Black Magick speakers. The 1790 and 1791 (pictured) Black Magick Extension Cabinets are ideal companions to the 1695T Black Magick amp. **More info: [suprousa.com](http://suprousa.com)**



## LOUD & LIGHT

Fishman's Loudbox Mini produces 60 watts of clean power and has two channels featuring Fishman's pre-amp and tone control designs. The amp also features digital reverb and chorus for the instrument channel and reverb for the microphone channel. **More info: [fishman.com](http://fishman.com)**



## UPTOWN FUNK

Godin's 5th Avenue Uptown SilverGold is an archtop guitar with a top-to-bottom metallic finish. Its resonant body has the vintage twang and growl of a late-1950s archtop thanks to a pair of TV Jones Classic pickups controlled via a three-way toggle switch. The 5th Avenue Uptown SilverGold is a limited edition guitar and includes the Godin archtop TRIC case. **More info: [godinguitars.com](http://godinguitars.com)**



## LET'S DO IT AGAIN

The Ibanez George Benson 40th Anniversary Signature Model GB40THII features a solid spruce top matched with flamed maple back and sides. A narrower hollowbody with a slim three-piece maple set-in neck creates a warm, open sound with excellent response, projection and sustain. The gold hardware and 40th anniversary inlay on the headstock, bridge and tailpiece add a touch of elegance. **More info: [ibanez.com](http://ibanez.com)**



## PREMIER JAZZ BOX

D'Angelico's flagship EXL-1 model is now available in its Premier series. Crafted from John D'Angelico's original design, the Premier EXL-1's balanced, organic tone recalls the sound of a classic New York jazz box. The model boasts signature D'Angelico features in its Stairstep tailpiece, Skyscraper truss rod cover and iconic headstock. **More info: [dangelicoguitars.com](http://dangelicoguitars.com)**



## NOSTALGIC TONES

Designed by 12-string guitarist Paul Brett as a tribute to the pioneering blues era of the 1930s and the legendary Blind Willie McTell, the Vintage V5000SB-12 Statesboro' oozes nostalgia. The Statesboro's rosewood bridge with bone saddles and bone nut provides quality intonation and tone with plenty of volume. **More info: [fretking-vintage.com](http://fretking-vintage.com)**



## MODERN TWIST

Mitchell's MS400 single-cutaway electric guitar employs a classic design with a modern twist. Part of Mitchell's re-imagined line of electric guitars, the MS400 is a fresh take on the single-cutaway guitar, with a slim-tapered, set neck profile and adjustable TOM-style bridge. **More info: [mitchellelectricguitars.com](http://mitchellelectricguitars.com)**



# PIANO & KEYBOARD



## DUAL-ENGINE DIGITAL

Roland's RD-2000 digital stage piano is designed for compatibility with software-based instruments. It includes more than 1,100 non-piano sounds, including organs, strings, brass and synths. It features a second SuperNATURAL-based sound engine with 128-voice polyphony for electric pianos and additional sounds (compatible with RD-800 Live Sets). **More info: [roland.com](http://roland.com)**

## 2-IN-1

The N3X extends Yamaha's AvantGrand piano line with a model that offers the experience of playing two iconic pianos—the Yamaha CFX concert grand piano and the Bösendorfer Imperial grand piano—in one instrument. The AvantGrand N3X retains several features of its predecessor, the N3, including an array of actuators (Tactile Response System) that recreate the key vibrations intrinsic to a concert grand piano. **More info: [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)**



## GRAND SOURCE

The Celviano Grand Hybrid GP-300WE features Casio's AiR Grand Sound Source, which enables beautiful sound and rich reverberation just like a grand piano. Its keyboard action was jointly developed with piano maker C. Bechstein so that a vertical hammer mechanism faithfully simulates grand piano hammer movements. **More info: [casio.com](http://casio.com)**

## EPIC ODYSSEY

Korg has introduced a more faithful reproduction of the iconic 1970s ARP Odyssey synthesizer with a new full-sized model: the ARP Odyssey FS. An alternative to the 86-percent-size ARP Odyssey released in 2015, the ARP Odyssey FS features a spacious panel layout with a standard-sized keyboard. It comes in three versions that replicate classic models in the ARP Odyssey's evolution. **More info: [korg.com](http://korg.com)**



## MODEL D RETURNS

Moog Music has resumed production of the Minimoog Model D, the world's first portable synthesizer. Though no changes have been made to the original sound engine or audio signal path, the reissued Model D now includes a series of functional modifications that expand this instrument's sonic capabilities. **More info: [moogmusic.com](http://moogmusic.com)**

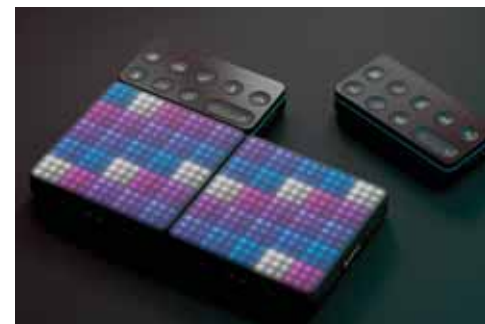
## RESPONSIVE HAMMERS

Kawai has added to its ES range of digital pianos with the ES110, an updated model featuring a new Responsive Hammer Compact keyboard action. The ES110 also features Harmonic Imaging 88-key piano sampling, dedicated line-out jacks and built-in Bluetooth wireless connectivity. It is available in both black and white finishes. **More info: [kawaius.com](http://kawaius.com)**



## BUILDING BLOCKS

Blocks is Roli's new modular music-making system that allows users to create sounds in simple and creative ways. Blocks are LEGO-like, 4- by 4-inch touchpads that snap together magnetically into scalable music production units. The workhorse of the Blocks series is the Lightpad Block, which features a pressure-sensitive silicone pad with an illuminated grid. Each colored light on the pad represents a different tone. **More info: [roli.com](http://roli.com)**



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# BRASS SCHOOL»

A photograph of two men, Mark Buselli and Brent Wallarab, standing against a plain grey background. Mark Buselli, on the left, is wearing glasses, a dark blazer over a light blue shirt, and holding a silver trumpet. Brent Wallarab, on the right, is wearing a grey cardigan over a black polo shirt and holding a large stack of musical score papers. Both men are looking towards the camera with slight smiles.

## ORCHESTRATING BIG BAND BRASS

*By Mark Buselli*  
Page 80

Mark Buselli (left) and Brent Wallarab of the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra (Photo by Mark Sheldon)

**EXPOSED MELODIC BASS TROMBONE**  
*By Brent Wallarab*  
Page 82

**NICK FINZER**  
*Master Class*  
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**TOMASZ STAŃKO**  
*Transcription*  
Page 90

**TOOLSHED**  
Page 92

# 7 IDEAS FOR ORCHESTRATING BIG BAND BRASS

By Mark Buselli

**I remember growing up listening to Maynard Ferguson, Chase, Count Basie and Duke Ellington, and being enamored with the trumpets. Those sections were so powerful, and the soloists all had amazing high chops. I loved the horn bands Earth, Wind & Fire and Chicago, and I thought that my career would head in that direction. Then, the bottom dropped out when I heard Miles Davis and Gil Evans' *Sketches Of Spain*. I heard colors and textures that were new to me in the jazz world. I was fascinated, to say the least. From there, I remember hearing a recording of "Dalvatore Sally" by the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra. The woodwinds on doubles and the horns with mutes drew me in with their different shades of color.**

**W**hen Brent Wallarab and I started the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra in 1994, we discussed all of these different possibilities of sound and texture. We wanted a French horn because of the blending possibilities. Trumpets and trombones had to have mutes, and the trumpet players had to have flugelhorn.

I was very fortunate to have studied arranging with Greg Hopkins, Herb Pomeroy and David Baker. Each had their own voice and a clear and concise way to explain how and what they did. My world of orchestration opened up when I read Henry Mancini's book *Sounds and Scores*, a guide to professional orchestration featuring recorded musical examples. I was able to read the scores and listen to the music at the same time.

This article, which deals with arranging and orchestrating for the brass section, is laid out in a similar fashion. If you want to listen while you follow along with the written scores, go to my website ([markbuselli.com](http://markbuselli.com)) and click on "DownBeat" in the top menu bar. All of the examples are my arrangements, presented in concert pitch. The scores are included as PDF files.

Example 1, from my composition "An Old Soul," highlights the importance of unison lines and how to balance them. In this sec-

tion there are three different lines happening. The first line consists of a French horn, played by Celeste Holler-Seraphinoff, and two tenor saxophones. The second line contains four flugels, and the third consists of three bones and a bass clarinet. Combining the brass in different combinations with the woodwinds, such as the horn with saxes and the bass clarinet with the trombones, creates an interesting texture not normally heard.

Example 2 is a background line that occurs during a piano solo by Luke Gillespie on "An Old Soul." Trumpets and trombones are both scored in cup mutes. The mutes lend to the lightness behind the piano. To achieve the desired "punch," I created major-seventh intervals in the voicings. The first bar has the third of the sus chord in trumpet 1 and the 13th in trumpet 4. So, trumpet 1/trombone 1 and trumpet 4/trombone 2 are the major sevenths, but I also get another "rub" between trumpet 3/trumpet 4 with a half step—"three points of dissonance" as Herb Pomeroy would say. This dissonance is resolved at the A $\flat$ /E $\flat$  chord.

Example 3 features a unison background line on the Charles Mingus composition "Fables Of Faubus." It is played behind the trumpet solo of Mike Hackett. The line consists of two trumpets in harmon mute along with two tenor saxes an octave down. The ear is drawn to the

tenors on the bottom, with a buzz above it in the trumpets. I like simple background lines a lot; too much going on puts the soloist in background prison.

Example 4 features the introduction to "My Shining Hour." Four flugels in two-part harmony and a trombone section that breaks into four part harmony scored in the mid to low registers of the horn make for a dark, lush brass section. I then add the bass as a voice and achieve the dissonance I want in the fourth bar. The bass sounds down an octave from what's written, thereby creating that flat-nine interval between it and the bass trombone. When the bass is used with the brass section, the resulting mix can create interesting textures.

Example 5 is a shout chorus on "Angel Eyes." If you want everything to be played like you are hearing it in your head, make sure you take the time to learn about brass articulations. This knowledge will make or break your chart. On this arrangement I use the French horn as a second trombone. Joey Tartell plays this beautifully on lead trumpet, and Jeff Conrad on second trumpet adds strong support. The alto saxophone solo is by Michael Stricklin.

Example 6 features the whole brass section on "Chelsea Bridge." I wrote the lead line first and scored downward. The French horn takes the place of the second trombone, and





Mark Buselli

I keep the bass trombone mainly on roots to anchor the harmonic tensions above. The last bar features Tartell on a double  $A\flat$ , four octaves above the bass trombone. Notice how I gave Tartell almost three bars of rest to set up for this. When writing for brass, one must remember that they must breathe to set them up for success.

Example 7 is the ending of “Fables Of Faubus.” I remember hearing Gerry Mulligan’s arrangement on George Wallington’s composition “Godchild” from the Miles Davis compilation album *Birth Of The Cool*, and admired the way he scored Davis’ trumpet on an  $A\flat$  above the staff and had the horn on a G (a minor ninth)

below. He had the baritone sax an octave below the horn on another G over an F minor chord that resolved to  $A\flat$  major. I loved this sound and the tension it created and used this concept on the last chord. I have the lead trombone (played by Loy Hetrick) scored a minor ninth below the second trumpet for that unsettled effect. If you write a piece for a 1940s swing band, this flat-nine interval would not be acceptable.

Always know what genre of music you are working in and tailor your orchestration to fit that sound. Dissonances of the past slowly become the consonances of the future. Also, make sure to study scores and try to figure out what is going on with any sound that catches your ear.

If you are unsure about something, talk to a brass player. Ask if the line you are writing would sound good where you envision it. Do some research and have fun making the world a better place through music. **DB**

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Trumpeter and educator Mark Buselli is director of jazz studies at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and co-director of the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra, which has presented more than 1,000 public performances and hundreds of educational clinics across the U.S. Midwest. The band has recorded eight CDs, the most recent being *Basically Baker, Vol. II: The Big Band Music Of David Baker (Patois)*, a follow-up to its 2005 release *Basically Baker, Vol. I*. Buselli has published more than 40 arrangements for big bands, brass ensemble and piano/trumpet. A Yamaha performing artist, he has played with high-profile artists such as Slide Hampton, Jimmy Heath, Slam Stewart, Natalie Cole and Ben Vereen. He can be reached at [mbuselli@bsu.edu](mailto:mbuselli@bsu.edu).

# The Exposed Melodic Use OF BASS TROMBONE IN A BIG BAND

*By Brent Wallarab*

**The bass trombone is one of my favorite voices in a big band. In the hands of a fine player, the instrument possesses great versatility and provides the arranger with many options. There is considerable lyricism inherent in the instrument, and when used independently of the rest of the section, the bass trombone provides a lush melodic voice.**

**T**he melodic potential of the bass trombone in a big band setting was recognized by pioneer bass trombonist George Roberts, who inspired Johnny Richards to feature the instrument in an arrangement of “Stella By Starlight” for the Stan Kenton band in the early 1950s. Since then, many other writers have penned features for the bass trombone, a topic that has been fairly well documented in published articles and online message boards. In this article, I discuss the exposed melodic use of bass trombone within the structure of a big band arrangement or composition. I cite several examples from my own arrangements, and if you want to listen while you follow along with the written scores, go to the website of my partner in the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra, Mark Buselli ([markbuselli.com](http://markbuselli.com)), and click on “DownBeat” in the top menu bar. There you will find audio files from our recordings as well as PDF files of the appropriate scores.

To begin, let’s mention four ways in which the bass trombone is most commonly utilized in a big band. In no particular order of importance, they are:

- Functioning as trombone 4, playing the lowest voice in a harmonized chord. In closed position, the bass trombone can provide the lowest harmonic voice in a trombone or brass passage, functioning not unlike the fourth tenor of the saxophone section, while in an open, chorale voicing the bass trombone provides a rich, resonant fundamental to the harmony.
- Used to reinforce a bass line, often with left-hand piano, baritone saxophone or bass clarinet joining in. This technique adds weight to a written bass line, allowing it to have more presence.
- Providing rhythmic figures that play off of the rest of the ensemble, usually doubling the bass, left-hand piano and often the baritone sax.
- Joining the tenor trombones in a unison melodic passage or providing a heavier texture by playing the line an octave below the rest of the section.

While the bass trombone can easily play in the tenor trombone range, the instrument shines in the range between pedal Bb up to Bb below middle C. For the arranger, it is important to recognize the bass trombone as a uniquely different instrument from the tenor trombones that make up the rest of a big band section. There is indeed considerable overlap in range, but what the bass trombone brings to the table is utterly unique. I often think of the bass trombone as a fifth section unto itself (trumpet, trombone, saxophone and rhythm being the other four), on its own or in some combination with acoustic bass, left-hand piano or baritone sax/bass clarinet. The instrument’s large

bore results in a warm sound that cannot be matched by any other instrument in the big band. While it can blend easily with the rest of the section, there are many missed opportunities if this is the only role the instrument plays.

Regarding the range of the bass trombone, one does not have to write in the extreme low range of the instrument to benefit from its unique sound. The baritone range, occupying the whole of the bass clef and a bit below, is very effective with the bass trombone. It is one of my favored ranges for exposed bass trombone and has a very different character than that of the extreme low range. Like all instruments, the bass trombone can play a figure in multiple octaves. The middle register of the instrument is warm and lyrical. The lower register, certainly pedal Bb and lower, contains more turbulence to the tone, however subtle, due to the complexity of the overtones.







Brent Wallarab

It is quite common to have the bass trombone and acoustic bass double figures note-for-note, mitigating a muddy texture at the bottom of the tonal spectrum. The effect is that the bass trombone timbre is what is heard as the carrier of the melody enhanced by the pizzicato articulation of the bass, melding the bass trombone seamlessly with the rhythm section. I rarely add the baritone saxophone or left-hand piano to these passages unless it is a powerful theme that needs reinforcement. By and large, I much prefer the purity and transparency of the bass trombone alone with the acoustic bass. Writing passages in these lower registers does not automatically translate into heaviness, however. At mezzo piano, the bass trombone and acoustic bass combination can be light as a feather, yet due to the separation of range between bass/bass trombone and the rest of the band, still maintain presence.

Long passages are not necessary to acquire effective use of the horn, and in fact smaller moments can be very compelling. It's not necessary to draw attention to the instrument for it to make a difference. Example 1, an excerpt from "Mezzanine," is a melody passage written for acoustic bass and bass trombone. The melodic material in most big band arrangements resides with the trumpets, high saxes, tenor saxes and tenor trombones, in that order of hierarchy. Extending the melody to the bass voices expands the depth of orchestration in a composition or arrangement. Note that the way the melody resolves at the end of the phrase brings the bass and bass trombone back to their role as the fundamental harmonic underpinning of a chord.

Example 2, also from "Mezzanine," illustrates another melodic technique for bass/bass trombone. The bass/bass trombone could have

simply been left to play the fundamental pitches for the harmonized ensemble chords, but by melodically embellishing the bass notes as shown, there is now melody happening at the top and bottom of the band simultaneously. A writer should always seek out opportunities for tasty counterpoint to add interest and depth.

Another very appealing effect is to write melodic figures for the bass trombone that setup background figures behind solos. In the passage shown in Example 3, an excerpt from the piece "Happenstance," the harmonized solo backgrounds could function perfectly fine on their own, yet by having the bass trombone provide lead-ins to these figures, we have added a melodic element to the backgrounds as well as some variety in texture. The bass trombone is an ideal instrument for this technique as it will generally not interfere with the sonic space of the soloist, which will reside at least a couple



In Example 4, which is the introduction to my arrangement of “The Nearness Of You,” the solo passage could be played on tenor trombone, as the line does indeed inhabit the range available to that instrument, but as the role of the melody changes, descending from the tenor range down through the baritone range and into the bass register, a bass trombone is the ideal instrument. Its warm tone, due to a large bore, gives even the portion in the tenor range a subtly unique character.

Rich Dole has been bass trombonist with the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra since its inception in 1994 and can be heard to great effect on all of our recordings. He is featured prominently on the bass trombone features “Azure” and “Stompin’ At The Savoy” and in dozens of little melodic moments as described above on all of our releases. **DB**

of octaves above the bass trombone melodies. Conversely, I would not use this technique if the soloist were a baritone sax or bass.

Also note that in this instance, I am not doubling the bass trombone line with the acoustic bass. Especially during solos when the rhythm section is improvising their parts as well, one usually wishes to keep consistency and not write involved bass figures that

may come off as jarring or unnatural. In these instances, I often write out an idiomatic bass line that rhythmically and harmonically supports the bass trombone so as not to step on the passage while sounding congruous with the improvising rhythm section.

The bass trombone is uniquely suited to play beautifully across the tenor, baritone and bass ranges over the course of a single phrase.

Brent Wallarab, co-director of the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra, is an associate professor of jazz studies at Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, where he directs Jazz Ensemble I and teaches courses in jazz arranging, composition and big band history. Wallarab served a 20-year tenure as lead trombonist and chief transcriber for the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and has been arranger-in-residence for the American Pianists Association since 2004. The Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra has presented more than 1,000 public performances since 1994 (including a 12-year weekly residency at the Jazz Kitchen in Indianapolis) and conducted hundreds of educational clinics across the Midwest. The group has recorded eight CDs, the most recent being *Basically Baker, Vol. II: The Big Band Music Of David Baker* (Patois), a follow-up to its 2005 release *Basically Baker, Vol. 1*. Contact Wallarab at [bwallarab@indiana.edu](mailto:bwallarab@indiana.edu).

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# Clarity: The Art Behind Artistry

**I**magine yourself walking out onto the stage, lights beating down on the bandstand. You look around and see your favorite musicians smiling at you; you feel ready to bring your music to life. The audience's applause tells you they are excited for your show. No one at the concert knows about the 4 a.m. lobby call, the missed flight and the fact that you've arrived at the venue just moments before the gig. It's in this moment that your training must come into focus. It's time to execute your vision with clarity, finesse and beauty.

As a professional musician, it's not a matter of *if* this situation will occur, but a matter of *when*. The stresses of the road require that we've prepared ourselves musically to the point where we're able to execute at the highest levels, despite such factors.

I remember attending a concert while still in high school where a famous trombonist had to run in to the performance straight from the airport—sweatpants and all. In that moment, I realized the true level of preparation that is behind the artists we admire.

The central focus behind my musical preparedness can be summed up in just one word: clarity. I think about clarity as it relates to all aspects of musicianship, artistry, communication and vision. The idea of clarity directly correlates to our focus while practicing, our attention to details and development of our concept. I don't mean to insinuate that all music needs to be "clean" or "perfect"; I mean that whatever style we play, we should have a clear idea of what we want to sound like in that context. That could be gutbucket blues, searing bebop, a romantic ballad or totally free/noise. Clarity means that you are approaching your music with intention, you have a musical vision and you execute that vision with as much integrity as you can.

As an instrumentalist, it was instilled in me at an early age that one of most important things (if not the most important thing) you can develop is your sound. Not "your sound" in an individualized/artistic way, but in a practical/technical way. Is your sound resonant in all registers? Can you play with the same fullness and sonority in the upper and lower registers? Do you have a romantic sound for playing a ballad? A sound for playing a burning uptempo bebop tune? When I'm working with a student instrumentalist, we talk about sound and having a sound concept, often. We start by talking about what it means to have a "good" sound. What qualities does a "good" sound have? To me a "good" sound is one that is round but focused, dark and warm but can cut if it needs to, resonant and consistent in all registers, and in tune in all keys.

My concept includes sonic elements from many of my favorite trombonists: J.J. Johnson, Curtis Fuller, Slide Hampton, Steve Turre, Wycliffe Gordon, Steve Davis and Joe Alessi. If you haven't considered what might constitute your own sound concept, I encourage you to write down three to five of your favorite players, along with words that describe their sound. When you're playing through your warmup routine, focus on creating this sound that you imagined in your mind's ear by combining all of your favorite elements from your favorite players' sounds.

How are we able to develop this sound concept? Listening. More specifically, active listening. That is, paying attention to the details of a recording. This is music in the foreground, not background to your commute or daily chores. The only way that we are able to create our own sound concept is to listen and try to imitate the masters of this music. When you think of the most iconic players, and listen to them enough, they become totally identifiable by their sound alone.

The more we listen, the deeper we can get into our understanding of the music. My num-



Nick Finzer



ber-one recommendation to students who are feeling lost with learning jazz: Listen more. Where do you get more vocabulary? Listen more. Where do you get more ideas? Listen more. The masters that we revere learned this way—it's up to us to put in the time to hear what came before so we can forge our own way into the future. When in doubt, listen more.

In order to execute your musical vision with clarity, it must be applied specifically to technique on your instrument. Coming from a brass player's perspective, important places to strive to achieve technical clarity are in the areas of flexibility and articulation.

Flexibility on a brass instrument was once described to me as the equivalent of stretching and warming up for athletes. In athletics we're preparing our bodies to be able to execute the necessary movements to succeed. For us, we're preparing ourselves to be able to play in any

**If our goal is to communicate with our audiences, then having clarity of intent will allow us to reach them directly and deeply.**

necessary fashion: fast or slow, legato or staccato, high or low, scalar or intervallic.

For me, focusing a large amount of practice time on these fundamentals has been absolutely essential. If nothing else in a day of practice, I have to get through a warmup routine. Keeping the basics as strong as possible in the body's muscle memory allows us to play with as much clarity as possible when we have to play in our worst-case scenarios (e.g., no time to warm up, flying all day, exhausted, etc.).

With brass flexibility exercises, we frequently get stuck in one position (or valve combination). But how often does real music require us to play only up and down the overtone series? In my experience, not often. If you look at Figures 1 and 2 on the following page, you'll see two flexibility exercises: one organized around the perfect fourth (Figure 1) and the other around the perfect fifth (Figure 2). These exercises will get you outside of your usual routine and challenge you to play smooth lip slurs while changing positions (or valve combinations) that are much more likely to appear in a live music setting, and are definitely more challenging. The goal should be the same fluidity and connectedness as if you aren't changing positions (or valve combinations) in addition to playing with a full and resonant sound throughout.

In jazz, articulation is a complex topic—especially when we start talking across various eras, players and styles. But in trombone terms, we need to have a clean and clear approach to playing legato (smooth), staccato (separated) and somewhere in the middle (affectionately coined *staggado* by my teacher, Steve Turre), which is one of the the main types of jazz trombone articulation. To practice these, I have my students play through a major scale workout (easily findable online at [nickfinzermusic.com/scaleworkout](http://nickfinzermusic.com/scaleworkout)) using these three varieties of articulation. After mastering the scalar approach in that workout, we advance to the major scale arpeggio workout shown in Figure 3. Not only will working on playing these arpeggios cleanly with a variety of articulations allow you greater flexibility to play your improvisational ideas, but it will garner a greater understanding and improvisational flexibility within each of the major key centers.

Flexibility covers more than just exercises, though. As freelancers, and especially as jazz musicians, we're expected to be able to perform

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in many contexts. We must be ready to play anything that's thrown our way. For me, that means having a clear idea of a range of styles, knowing how to get a characteristic sound and playing with appropriate articulations—all while using the proper musical vocabulary for each situation. For instance, if you're playing an early-jazz gig, is it musically appropriate to rip your favorite Coltrane lines? Probably not. The same goes for playing funk, & pop, salsa, you name it.

This is where paying attention to the details matters. Have you listened to iconic instrumentalists playing in a variety of styles? Have you transcribed Fred Wesley or Maceo Parker? Maybe Jimmy Bosch or Willie Colon? We all put in the time with our favorites like Bird and Diz, or J.J. Johnson and Curtis Fuller, but we need a depth of understanding when we're playing other musical styles as well.

When I've been asked about what advice I can pass on from my teachers, I always answer the same: practice slow. When you think you've slowed it down enough, you probably haven't. Practicing slow allows you time to focus on the intricate details and nuance of your playing, and forces you to address your technical deficiencies.

Slow and deliberate practice allows you to implement the clarity of sound, articulation and flexibility that we strive for in our practice of the fundamentals. I'm consistently amazed by how challenging it is to play through a basic exercise with *true* clarity of focus and technical precision. This method of practice has garnered the greatest returns in my personal practice—I encourage you to slow down.

Applying the same approach to practicing improvisation allows your mind time to think and to hear new pathways through chord changes. As an improvisational exercise, try to play several choruses of all quarter notes (as if you're playing a walking bass line) over your favorite simple standard at 60 bpm or slower. Try and stretch to the outer reaches of your range and force yourself to find new pathways between the chord changes. Once you are comfortable with that, try a similar exercise with only eighth notes. After a few choruses, you'll start to explore past your usual chord vocabulary and likely stumble upon some ideas you hadn't thought of before at faster tempos.

With all of these ideas, we are focusing on the individual elements that combine to elevate the bigger picture. A great sound and sound concept are the foundation on which we build our technical skills. Developing clean and clear articulation facilitates clarity of phrases. Greater flexibility will enhance your execution of music that includes wide

**Figure 1: Fourths Flexibility**



**Figure 2: Fifths Flexibility**



**Figure 3: Major Key Triad Workout**





Nick Finzer's album *Hear & Now* is reviewed on page 66.



intervals. Deeper understanding of harmony will allow you more freedom while improvising. If our goal is to communicate with our audiences, then having this clarity of intent will allow us to reach them directly and deeply.

To truly tackle our greatest artistic aspirations, we must take the time to develop ourselves musically. Fine-tuning our instrumental craft serves to enhance our art by allowing us to execute our ideas with clarity and intention. I encourage you to prepare to take on any musical challenge through your study of sound, style, flexibility and articulation. Be sure to pay attention to the details. The details are where the magic lives. **DB**

Composer, arranger and trombonist Nick Finzer is on a mission to be a passionate voice defining the sound of jazz in the current age. His latest recording, *Hear & Now* (Outside In Music), was released in February. Finzer is a two-time winner of ASCAP's Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composers Award (2013 and 2015), and in 2011 he won the Eastern Trombone Workshop's National Jazz Trombone Competition. He has performed at top jazz clubs and concert venues with Wynton Marsalis' Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, Lucas Pino's No Net Nonet, Ryan Truesdell's Gil Evans Project, Bob Stewart's Double Quartet, Anat Cohen, Frank Wess, Lew Tabackin, Terrell Stafford, Lewis Nash and the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Walt Weiskopf, John Clayton, Slide Hampton, Frank Kimbrough, Carl Allen, Ray Drummond and Steve Turre. Finzer is also known for his work as part of the pop web phenom band Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox, and his jazz videos and albums have been seen and heard around the world. For more information, visit [nickfinzermusic.com](http://nickfinzermusic.com) or contact [brian.ross@therossgroupft.com](mailto:brian.ross@therossgroupft.com).

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# Tomasz Stańko's Solo on 'Suspended Variation VI'

In 2004, trumpeter Tomasz Stańko released *Suspended Night* (ECM), a title that I assume refers to the plenitude of suspended-type harmonies evident in the compositions. On the seventh track, “Suspended Variation VI,” we hear not only the Asus and Csus chords, but also some chords over their ninths (Fmaj7/G, D $\flat$ /Eb, C/D and A $\flat$ /Bb). Though these are not technically suspended chords, they do have a suspended sound, since the upper triad contains the second and fourth of the bass note (but not the third).

Stańko plays a very melodic solo over these chords. One aspect of his playing that stands out is his use of space. There are many spots where he lays out for a measure or even two. In fact, Stańko is silent for more than 25 percent of his solo on this track. Being comfortable with so much space is testament to Stańko's security in his playing. Just like in conversation, it can be awkward to leave so much space, but Stańko shows great self-assurance in how comfortable he is with emptiness. And, just like in conversation, it's best when we leave room for others to speak. In this solo, you'll notice that in those “empty” spaces, the other musicians

(mainly the piano) often answer Stańko's statements.

When Stańko is playing, he also shows remarkable restraint in his rhythmic choices. The song has an eighth-note feel (although it could be felt as 16ths, and all the rhythms written as half their value; I chose to write it this way in part for ease of reading). Much of his performance here is composed of eighth notes, but we do hear quite a few quarter-note triplets (measures 8–12, 19–20 and 28), which is a slower rhythm than eighths, aiding the relaxed feel. In two instances (bars 16–17 and 29–30) he even bases his lines on very “unhip” quarter-note rhythms.

Even in Stańko's lines, there is a lot of space. Notice how rarely he plays strings of eighths, instead putting rests and long tones between his eighths. There is only one spot where he “shreds,” and that's the long run of 16ths in bar 23. Curiously, this is in the exact center of his improvisation. So rather than creating a climax with range (a very popular method), Stańko here does it with rhythmic density.

Also notice his use, and sometimes non-use, of syncopation. I pointed out before the places where he plays only on strong beats. After one



of those (measure 31), he does the opposite and plays a bar of solely offbeats. This provides a striking rhythmic contrast. More often Stańko creates this contrast by using them together. His very first lick starts on a weak beat, then lands on a quarter note on the 1, kicks off again on the second beat, but ends on the “and” of 4, an anticipation of the next bar. We hear this sort of alternation between stressing strong and weak beats throughout his solo. Measures 32–34 and 37–38 are great examples. Even his last repeated A note alternates between being on a strong beat (1) and a weak beat (“and” of 2). His quarter-note triplets, which most people tend to play from downbeat to downbeat, show this same contrast.

Notice that he rarely starts or ends these triplet figures on the 1. In bars 8 and 9, he instead starts on the last part of the triplet and ends in the middle. Though his next line does begin on the downbeat, he plays until the middle of the first triplet of the next bar. Quarter-note triplets already create a feeling of discontinuity with the underlying rhythm. Add this syncopation to it and we get an even more “floaty” vibe.

Couple all this with his use of range: Stańko favors the middle and lower registers, only climbing above the staff once (bar 11) and only hitting the top of the staff twice (measures 23 and 31). He doesn’t dazzle us with stratospheric displays or rhythmic bursts, but he does explore the lower end of the horn. His first line ends below the staff, as do his final notes (probably not a coincidence that they both are the same low A). He even hits the very bottom of the horn in bar 29. This is part of a line that not only is entirely below that staff, but is composed of

the simple quarter-note rhythms. Combining the easy rhythms with the low pitches sounds ultra-relaxed, so the quarter notes end up being hip after all. There seems to be a gravity to his improvising here, so even when he does climb, as with the 16th notes in measure 23, he drops back into the basement fairly quickly (as we hear him do right away in bar 24). This sense of gently falling adds to the solo’s relaxed mood.

Stańko also juxtaposes long and short notes. After that string of quarter notes referred to before, the next bar is all staccato notes on offbeats, but whereas the quarter notes were played for their full value and connected (or legato), the offbeats are all cut short (or staccato). Playing a full bar of each side by side makes the contrast clear, but Stańko also does it more subtly. For example, after the legato descending triplets in bars 11–12, Stańko hits one sharp staccato D in the next measure. Even cooler is after playing some straight notes in measure 14, he then hits a couple of staccato notes in measure 15, and then leans on a quarter-note E, giving it its full length. Then some more staccato notes to end this phrase. The back-and-forth between the articulations is quite dramatic.

Also of note are Stańko’s variations in timbre. His tone tends to be sharp and distinct, but on the low trills he’ll go for a more growly sound. And bars 8–9 as well as 19–21 present a very fuzzy sound (that makes the pitches fairly unclear). This creates a sharp contrast to the more defined sound he uses through much of the rest of the improvisation, giving the listener another contrast that moves the solo along. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at [jimidurso.com](http://jimidurso.com).

## Kanstul 1603 Committee Trumpet

### *Classic Sound, Elegant Design*

If you don't know the Martin Committee trumpet by name, chances are you'd probably recognize its sound. Miles Davis famously played one, as did Dizzy Gillespie and Lee Morgan at points in their careers. The instrument was designed at the behest of Heinrich Martin, founder of Martin Co., who in 1939 recruited a panel of top-tier trumpet manufacturers and players in his efforts to craft a new horn. Through the 1940s and '50s, the Committee was the holy grail of the jazz trumpet world, known for its velvety timbre, steady intonation and clarion projection.

Martin Co. ceased commercial production of the instrument in 1971, not long after being sold to Leblanc (though the company made a custom model for Davis). Today, Anaheim, California-based Kanstul Musical Instruments has revived the Committee trumpet with the introduction of the 1603 B-flat model, which is faithfully based on the original Martin design.

Like its progenitor, the Kanstul 1603 Committee packs a robust sound into a simple and elegant design. A brace-free tuning slide, saddle-less first-valve slide and side-mounted water keys make the horn a streamlined masterwork, free of extraneous lines, and the hand-hammered yellow brass and clear lacquer finish available on standard models provide flash. A silver-plated version is available upon request, and special accommodations can be made for customized finger buttons and bell material.

But the beauty of the Kanstul 1603 is more than skin deep. I play-tested the 1603 at home with a spin through my Davis and Chet Baker transcription books, and I was immediately impressed with the horn's buttery, almost flugel-like tone. That sound is the result of the conical nature of the 1603's continuous tapered leadpipe, a trait it shares with the original Martin Committee. What's more, the 1603 ratchets up the authenticity factor by boasting a Martin #3 bore, which at a whopping .470 inches comes close to replicating the powerful design specifications of its predecessor. (Original Committee bores measured .468 inches.)

I found the combination of bore and leadpipe made for an optimal bal-

ance of resistance and openness. The horn provided just enough high-register cushion to slot efficiently, but without restricting my embouchure or pushing back against my air column. Likewise, in the lower register, the horn remained free-blowing and supple enough to rip through even the quickest runs below the staff.

As for playability and feel, the Kanstul 1603 delivered with a superb valve system. The trumpet's hand-lapped pistons—though springier than I prefer—responded nicely under my fingers, and the genuine Martin main braces added solidity without hampering the horn's agility or nuanced sound-color.

The included Kanstul G2 mouthpiece—based on the model given to Davis by legendary brass instructor Joseph Gustaf—offers plenty of bite courtesy of its flatter rim and short shank. A relatively deep, voluminous cup adds depth and mellowness.

Kanstul had big shoes to fill in its re-creation of the Committee, and the Kanstul 1603 represents a big step toward reanimating the spirit of that legendary trumpet. It's no wonder that acclaimed trumpeter Wallace Roney has chosen to include a custom version in his arsenal of horns. According to Kanstul, a Roney edition is in the works. —Brian Zimmerman

[kanstul.com](http://kanstul.com)



## Denis Wick Synthetic Cup Mute

### *Responsive, Versatile, Durable*

The Denis Wick DW5575 Synthetic Trumpet Cup Mute is a remarkably versatile mute that definitely won't break the bank at \$24.99.

For years, the Denis Wick DW5531 Adjustable Cup Mute has been my go-to mute. I've loved the way it responds and speaks evenly in all registers while also providing the option to adjust the cup to access a wide range of tonal colors.

Although the new DW5575 Synthetic Trumpet Cup Mute does not have the adjustable cup option, it responds with a remarkably similar feel. The mute delivers the characteristically

broad "nasal" color I associate with the DW5531, but it also has a center to it that allows it to cut when you lean into it. It provides a very even feel and response from low to high.

I was particularly impressed with how sensitively the DW5575 responds to the front end of articulations—giving me an ability to really control the weight and style of the attack.

I felt at home playing the DW5575 in a big band trumpet section, and the mute worked equally as well in a smaller brass group setting. I also used the mute to play through the muted section of the Arutunian Concerto to see how the it would perform on solo literature. I was impressed with the dark color I could produce, the nuanced articulation and my ability to find the tonal center of each note.

As a school band director, I'm going to start steering my trumpet students toward purchasing this mute. I don't think you can find a more responsive, versatile and durable cup mute for the price. —Mike Pavlik

[deniswick.com](http://deniswick.com)



# Eastman ETR824S Trumpet

## *Upper-Register Power*

**T**he Eastman ETR824S B-flat trumpet is the newest entry to the company's 800 series of professional trumpets. I played this instrument over the course of a week in three very different musical settings and experienced varying degrees of satisfaction with it.

The horn itself is silver-plated, has a .459-inch medium-large bore, a yellow brass bell, stainless steel valves and a two-piece valve casing. Its bell also features quite a bit of scroll work. The bracing used is fairly common and has a standard water key on the tuning slide.

The first playing I did with this horn was in a Tower of Power-style horn sectional. I wasn't sure what to expect, as I was coming off a week's vacation that included only modest time and energy spent on my playing. After a few minutes of trying to find the best approach to blowing this horn, I settled in and discovered that the upper register, especially high D and above, has solid slotting and power. Even the A above double-G locked in well, which is rare for me on most horns. It was pretty easy to get the crisp, energetic sound I desired in this setting.

The second serious testing I did with this instrument was to rehearse classical-style songs with my piano accompanist. There is a compactness, bordering on tightness, to the sound this horn gets when playing soft to moderately loud. The middle and upper registers, though, do lock into pitch well, and I was very pleased with my control on a slow movement that sat around the top of the staff for a good portion of the movement. I also liked how I had the ability to lightly articulate and jump around accurately. I did, however, find it quite difficult to match intonation between the upper and lower registers. The low register seems decidedly high to the upper, and while it wasn't so far away that you couldn't adjust, it was definitely not a pleasant aspect. I did not like this horn's sound in the lowest register, as it gets thin and quite edgy.

The third setting in which I played this horn was a big band concert. While the upper register still had its "ring" or presence, the middle and lower registers seemed to disappear in this setting, and the intonation issues between registers were even more pronounced. Playing lead on it was inconsistent, although, again, the very highest parts were outstanding. Improvising was more comfortable, perhaps since I wasn't surrounded by so many other voices.

The wood case in which the trumpet comes is very nice, with firm, thick padding inside. There is one mouthpiece hole/slot, and a small area for music or other small supplies (you can't fit mutes inside the case). The outside is a fairly rugged vinyl and includes four zippered pouches of various sizes. There are also padded carry handles on both a long and short side to the case, and it also has a detachable shoulder strap. Be careful: The top has enough weight that if you do not hold onto it as you open the case, you could tip the case backward, potentially spilling the horn and other contents. Included with the horn are a Shires 3C mouthpiece, a bottle of valve oil and a polishing cloth.

I would say this instrument certainly has its place. For me, though, I only really enjoyed its upper-register power.

—Michael Stewart

[eastmanmusiccompany.com](http://eastmanmusiccompany.com)



# Wynton Marsalis Omnibook

## *Stylistic Traits, Accurate Transcriptions*

**H**al Leonard has dedicated the newest installment of its Omnibook series to the solo work of Wynton Marsalis. Available for B-flat instruments, the collection of 35 transcribed solos helps to outline the significant accomplishments and the artistic evolution of one of the most well-known jazz musicians of the past half century.

A succinct introduction neatly establishes a platform from which the reader can better understand and appreciate Marsalis' approach to improvisation. We learn about his influences and gain a perspective on the scope of his compositional output and the vast and varied configuration of ensembles with which he has performed.

An in-depth analysis of stylistic traits of Marsalis' playing is included. Multiple excerpts from his solos have been extracted and provide examples of his use of rhythmic displacement, flat-VI pentatonic, major 7 on dominant, chromatic substitutions, the five chromatic extensions of the dominant chord, odd note groupings, his approach to the blues, vocal effects, tension-and-release, melodic construction, unique intervallic leaps, declamatory New Orleans statements and his unparalleled technique.

An analysis of Marsalis' masterful solo on "Levee Low Moan" is also included. Author Todd Stoll provides a beautifully written description of this blues tune, which Marsalis included on the 1991 album *Levee Low Moan (Soul Gestures In Southern Blue, Vol. 3)*. This solo is regarded as a significant development in Marsalis' playing and contains many of the devices and concepts that are still present in his playing today.

The transcriptions featured in the *Wynton Marsalis Omnibook* contain tempo markings, style indications and chord symbols. It is affordably priced at \$19.95.

—Mike Pavlik  
[hal Leonard.com](http://hal Leonard.com)



Students in the Sound Recording Technology program work in Syracuse University's Belfer Audio Laboratory recording studio.

## Syracuse Music Students Keep Options Wide Open

**AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, JAZZ AND** commercial music students have no shortage of performance courses from which to choose. The school offers a course of study in jazz on instruments and voice, as well as a panoply of ensembles—among them funk, rock and vocal groups, in addition to the standard jazz bands.

But the school does not have a major in jazz performance. Why? “If we offer something that’s the same as in other places, we’re not really giving the students what they need,” explained John C. Coggiola, an associate professor of music education in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the School of Education who serves as director of jazz studies in the Setnor School of Music. “The strength of our program is our other degrees.”

Those include bachelor of music degrees in one of three areas—music industry, music education and sound recording technology—as well as a bachelor of arts in music.

Syracuse was a pioneer in the study of the music business, launching an accredited degree program in 1982. According to William DiCosimo—an associate professor of music and entertainment studies in the Setnor School and the music-industry program coordinator—the university’s powers-that-be at the time “decided it would be a viable degree option for the late 20th century.”

The strategy has proved successful well into the 21st century. Over the past two decades, DiCosimo said, the number of music-industry students at Syracuse has increased by about 50 percent. The point of the program is to keep

options open for students, many of whom will not make their living as full-time jazz artists.

The career paths of alumni range widely. They might be record-company executives, manage concert venues or write grant proposals for arts organizations. They may earn graduate degrees and work in entertainment law or for the education departments of institutions like Jazz at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall.

As they prepare for these careers, all music-industry students take basic music-proficiency courses. They earn credits in sound recording, live music promotion and record production. They study the music industry’s relationship to the law and to the media. And they avail themselves of electives as well as courses, internships, conferences and networking opportunities outside the music school.

The school, meanwhile, has added new programs to meet the demand. One is a degree track for sound recording technology. Another sister program—catering to those whose bent is financial more than technological—has been instituted in cooperation with the Martin J. Whitman School of Management. After five years, it yields an M.B.A.

“We’re trying to make sure our students are aware of the multiple pieces they should have experience in so they can navigate the actual reality of being an artist,” Coggiola said. “The evolution of how things work in the arts has been unbelievable, and it doesn’t stand alone. We can’t just teach a bunch of absolutes. Tomorrow might not be the way it is today.”

—Phillip Lutz



John Clayton

**IU Celebrates:** Jazz bassist and educator John Clayton will be the guest artist at Indiana University’s Jazz Celebration 2017, to be held April 22 at the Musical Arts Center (located at 101 N. Jordan Ave. in Bloomington). The Grammy winner will also perform as part of the Clayton Brothers Quintet (with his sibling Jeff on saxophone) on March 1–4 at Jazz at the Bistro in St. Louis. [music.indiana.edu](http://music.indiana.edu)

**Merger in Charleston:** Jazz Artists of Charleston (JAC) and the Leonard School of Music have joined forces to take youth music education to a higher level while making it more accessible to students of all socioeconomic groups. “The merging of the Leonard School of Music with Jazz Artists of Charleston plays an integral role in our mission of keeping jazz alive and thriving by developing young musicians and young audiences,” said Mary Beth Natarajan, executive director at JAC. [jazzartistsofcharleston.org](http://jazzartistsofcharleston.org)

**Virtual Lessons:** Access to advanced, specialized music education can be difficult for high school students who live in rural areas. A new initiative from the West Virginia University School of Music offers virtual music lessons to students at John Marshall High School in Glen Dale and Spring Mills High School in Martinsburg. Students for the program were selected based on their intent to audition for the West Virginia All-State Orchestra. “Many students don’t have the opportunity to have regular private lessons, and the repertoire for state auditions is very demanding, so students can be left feeling overwhelmed,” said Mikylah McTeer, associate professor of violin at WVU. Lessons were taught on violin, viola, cello and bass by WVU faculty members McTeer, Andrea Houde, Erin Ellis and Andy Kohn, respectively. [wvu.edu](http://wvu.edu)

**Jazz History:** Cambridge University Press has published a new book by Anna Harwell Celenza, the Thomas E. Caestecker Professor of Music at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. *Jazz Italian Style: From its Origins in New Orleans to Fascist Italy and Sinatra* examines the Italian influences on the development of American popular music. [cambridge.org](http://cambridge.org)





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# Catherine Russell

Catherine Russell's 2016 release, *Harlem On My Mind* (Jazz Village), reinforces the Harlem-born singer's fast-spreading reputation for delivering across-the-timeline repertoire on its own terms of engagement. In doing so, Russell upholds standards set by her father, Luis Russell, who directed Louis Armstrong's orchestras during the 1930s, and her mother, Carline Ray, a Juilliard-educated stalwart of the Sweethearts of Rhythm.

## Macy Gray

"Nothing Else Matters" (*Stripped*, Chesky, 2016) Gray, vocals; Russell Malone, guitar; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Daryl Johns, bass; Ari Hoenig, drums.

Macy Gray. It's jazzy. They're playing in the same room—no overdubbing. I like the washiness, the reverbiness of the sound. She's inhabiting the lyrics like she wrote or co-wrote it. [*It's by Metallica.*] I like it even more! [This is] what rock 'n' roll was like when it wasn't all loud, about the songs, and you heard different treatments. Macy opened for David Bowie on a tour when I was working with him, and I listened to her shows. She's unique.

## Duchess

"Laughing At Life" (*Laughing At Life*, Anzic, 2016) Amy Cervini, Hilary Gardner, Melissa Stylianou, vocals; Jeff Lederer, tenor saxophone; Michael Cabe, piano; Matt Aronoff, bass; Jared Schonig, drums.

I've heard Duchess sound like this live. Somehow the quality of this group seems different, but Duchess uses one saxophone and it sounds like their arranging. I like the tune. I can understand all the lyrics. I love vocal jazz harmony, and the choices are interesting. It's not all triads. Sometimes they're close; you've really got to listen to do that. [*after*] Billie Holiday sang it? I probably have it, and it doesn't sound like that, so I didn't recognize it.

## Andy Bey

"Worried Life Blues" (*Pages From An Imaginary Life*, High Note, 2014) Bey, piano, vocals. Andy Bey blows me away. It's jazz and blues married together. For me, jazz and blues are like white or brown on rice—there's no separation. That's how I approach jazz singing. I can't tell you what his way of singing and his expression does for me. It sounds so different than anything else. His soul infuses every note and every nuance of everything he sings and plays. I can listen to him forever.

## Jane Monheit

"I Was Doing All Right"/"Know You Know" (*The Songbook Sessions: Ella Fitzgerald*, Emerald City Records, 2016) Monheit, vocals; Nicholas Payton, trumpet; Brandee Younger, harp; Michael Kanan, electric piano; Neal Miner, bass; Rick Montalbano, drums; Daniel Sadownick, percussion.

Unmistakably Jane Monheit. I've never heard this tune treated like this. Sexy. Jane's voice is creamy. She's striding right in there as an instrument with the ensemble. The harp is killing me. I love the way she and the trumpet played back and forth at the end, and then how the vocal harmony came in. It's a classic production; it could be new or it could be 30 years old. Beautiful mix. I like where Jane's voice and the harp are placed. All the instruments are having a conversation, and the trumpet is outstanding.

## Herbie Hancock

"Tea Leaf Prophecy" (*River: The Joni Letters*, Verve, 2007) Hancock, piano; Joni Mitchell, vocals; Wayne Shorter, soprano saxophone; Dave Holland, bass; Lionel Loueke, guitar; Vinnie Colaiuta, drums.

Joni Mitchell. I've loved Joni and her writing since *Court And Spark* and the first three or four albums of the '70s. I feel it's the piano player's



Catherine Russell

STEVEN SUSSMAN

record and she's a guest, or something like that. The instruments are mixed louder than she is, and her words get swallowed up in piano fills, which is mildly frustrating. I don't want to have to strain to hear Joni Mitchell's words. She's a master. She puts words together like nobody else and expresses them like nobody else.

## Branford Marsalis Quartet featuring Kurt Elling

"Blue Gardenia" (*Upward Spiral*, Okeh, 2016) Elling, vocals; Marsalis, tenor saxophone; Joey Calderazzo, piano; Eric Revis, bass; Justin Faulkner, drums.

Kurt Elling with Branford's quartet. Gorgeous. Intimate. That reminds me of listening to old Chet Baker recordings. Very simple. You get the story. That's a hard lyric to sing. You really have to mean those words—and I get the meaning. Kurt's voice and Branford's horn harmonize together in a warm, sensuous sound.

## Gregory Porter

"The French-African Queen" (*Take Me To The Alley*, Blue Note, 2016) Porter, vocals; Yosuke Sato, alto saxophone; Keyon Harrold, trumpet; Chip Crawford, piano; Aaron James, bass; Emanuel Harrold, drums.

Gregory Porter. I love that he's putting new songs out in the jazz world. This track makes me want to go hear the gig. It's funny. It's celebratory. You can feel his joy. It has a great message—we're all speaking really the same language, in our different ways, but the same roots. His music is a mix of soul and jazz. He's a pleasure to listen to. I like the tone of his voice and the way he uses it. I can understand his words. The intention is very clear.

## Cécile McLorin Salvant

"Wives And Lovers" (*For One To Love*, Mack Avenue, 2015) Salvant, vocals; Aaron Diehl, piano; Paul Sikivie, bass; Lawrence Leathers, drums.

I loved this song when I was little. It's Cécile McLorin Salvant with the Aaron Diehl Trio. I love that she recorded this tune. She's so good and so young; it gives me hope. I love the heart and soul and expertise and precision. Her musicianship is flawless. She and Aaron think alike, and it sounds like that.

DB

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.





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